

TWENTY-NINE
MISCELLANEOUS
S E R M O N S.

BY
A. MACDONALD,
LATE MINISTER OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH AT
GLASGOW. *R*

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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TWENTY-NINE

STOOL LAMPS

S. E. R. M. O. N. S.



THE FOURTH EDITION

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THE author of the following Sermons, Mr. ANDREW MACDONALD, was a Minister of the Gospel at Glasgow, where his talents were held in great esteem, and his private virtues generally respected. These discourses were written during the time that he was employed in the duties of his sacred function, and several of them were composed for the improvement of his immediate congregation. They strongly exemplify the character of their author, being plain, perspicuous, A 2 fervid,

fervid, and argumentative; adapted at once to instruct the unenlightened, and satisfy the intelligent reader.

As it was the design of the writer, to reform practice rather than to promote speculation, he has but seldom entered into deep investigations, which the generality of readers could not be supposed to comprehend, and which therefore would have been little calculated to suggest such religious meditations as are necessary for the conduct of this life, and for inspiring hopes of a better. Yet it may be fairly said, that few men, however elevated by talents, or embellished with literature, will read these compositions without deriving moral and intellectual

ADVERTISEMENT. v

lectual advantages from them, as they exhibit conspicuous proofs of a mind warmed by piety, pregnant with various and extensive knowledge, and strengthened by profound reflection.

The author had attentively examined the best works of antiquity, as well as of modern writers, and constituted indeed the rare compound of the liberal critic, the acute philosopher, the refined scholar, and animated poet. As the duties of his clerical profession were by no means sufficient to occupy a mind active and excursive like his, he devoted the latter part of his life chiefly to literary pursuits; but, having no powerful friends

vi ADVERTISEMENT.

friends to patronize his abilities, and suffering under the infirmities of a weak constitution, he fell a victim, at the age of three and thirty, to sickness, disappointment, and misfortune.

5 JY61

CONTENTS.

CONTENTS.

I.	<i>A Saving Knowledge of the Supreme Being</i>	Page 1
II.	<i>An Estimate of the Human Character</i>	14
III.	<i>Religious Apostasy</i>	28
IV.	<i>The Beauty and Utility of pious Conversation</i>	40
V.	<i>The Greatness of the Divine Nature</i>	54
VI.	<i>In what the best Use of Affliction consists</i>	68
VII.	<i>The Bounty of Creation</i>	82
VIII.	<i>Right Principles unaccommodating</i>	97
IX.	<i>The Union of Faith and Holiness</i>	111
X.	<i>Contempt for National Religion criminalized</i>	125
XI.	<i>The respective Duties of Rich and Poor inculcated</i>	139
XII.	<i>The inestimable Value of Truth</i>	153
XIII.	<i>Providence vindicated in the Mixture of Good and Evil that appears in the World</i>	169
XIV.	<i>Religious Liberty asserted and explained</i>	182
	XV. <i>The</i>	

XV.	<i>The happy Effects of Trouble to the Pious</i>	195
XVI.	<i>The superior Worth of the Soul</i>	208
XVII.	<i>The Misery of a bad Temper</i>	221
XVIII.	<i>The treacherous Nature of Flattery</i>	235
XIX.	<i>The Reverence and Veneration due to the Almighty</i>	249
XX.	<i>The Advantages produced by Christianity</i>	264
XXI.	<i>Causes of rejecting the Gospel</i>	279
XXII.	<i>Imperfections of our present Knowledge</i>	294
XXIII.	<i>The Necessity and Importance of Charity</i>	308
XXIV.	<i>What constitutes the true Bond of Union among Christians</i>	321
XXV.	<i>The Benefit of Reproof</i>	336
XXVI.	<i>Various Degrees in the Practice of Vice</i>	350
XXVII.	<i>Christian Consanguinity</i>	364
XXVIII.	<i>The Brevity of Human Life</i>	378
XXIX.	<i>Character of Samson</i>	391

5 JY 61

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

I COR. i. 21.

AFTER THAT, IN THE WISDOM OF GOD,
THE WORLD BY WISDOM KNEW NOT
GOD, IT PLEASSED GOD BY THE FOOL-
ISHNESS OF PREACHING TO SAVE
THEM THAT BELIEVE.

THERE have often been fashion-
able kinds of wisdom, as well as fa-
shionable follies, and every science hath
had its vogue in the world. At many
schools of knowledge, some particular
branch of learning constitutes the mode,
some particular Doctor presides over reason
and common sense, which go for nothing
unless dignified with his approbation. In
the time of St. Paul, philosophy flourished
in Greece; not a sound and pure philoso-
phy,

phy, guided by reason, and patiently exploring the wonders of nature; but a philosophy full of prejudices, and guided entirely by the authority of certain chiefs of the sects, whose discourses and writings consisted of declamations more pompous than solid, and maxims more glaring than just. Yet without this philosophy and eloquence a man was then despised among the Greeks. The Apostles knew nothing of these ornaments, and the Gospel they preached was formed on a very different plan. Hence, by the wise, the scribe, and the disputer of this world, their doctrine was at first reckoned foolishness, till in the end it appeared, that by receiving it, more knowledge might be obtained of the most important truths, and surer hopes of happiness discovered, than from all the learning of the Porch and the Academy. Then those very men, who, in the porticoes of Athens, had declaimed on the beauties of virtue and the nature of the Deity, became content to be saved by believing; and owned that it was impossible
for

for the greatest philosophers to discover by the light of nature, those truths which compose the system of salvation.

The ideas which the ancient philosophers had conceived of natural religion, were never collected into one body of doctrine. They were dispersed in a thousand different works; some with Plato, some with Socrates, some with Pythagoras, some with Epicurus. There is hardly any man quite incapable of producing a noble thought: there is hardly any genius so narrow as to be unable to conceive some excellent maxim: but to lay down principles, and through a long chain of consequences to deduce certain conclusions, this is an effort of great genius, and the perfection of philosophy. If this be true, we shall not wonder, that they who by wisdom could not know God, were constrained to find him by believing in Christ crucified; whose divine revelation is united so strictly in one body, that every part is connected with all, one always supposeth another,

and one cannot be removed or displaced without affecting the whole.

The ancient philosophers, besides, had never any system of natural religion at all equal to that which is to be found in the writings of some moderns, even of those who boast of despising revelation. Our philosophers have stolen, from that very revelation which they affect to despise, whatever is most beautiful and sublime in their system. We acknowledge, that their doctrines of the divine perfections, of providence, and of futurity, are very agreeable to the lights of reason. We acknowledge, that a man able to carry human reason to its highest degree, might by it discover all these doctrines. But it is one thing to own, that these doctrines are agreeable to reason, and another to say, that they are founded in reason. It is one thing to own, that a man by the perfection of human reason might discover them, and another to say, that any man ever did so. It is only the Gospel which hath taught men in those subjects to use their reason. It is the

the Gospel which hath enabled us to form a body of natural religion. Our philosophers have availed themselves of this vast assistance, and framed their system of deism, by the discoveries made in the Gospel to mankind. And they have attributed the splendor of their work to its native lustre, while it entirely depends on borrowed light.

But the ancients, destitute of these helps, mixed their theology with a thousand contemptible dreams and reveries. Antiquity cannot boast of one philosopher who invented not some extravagance of this kind, which he carefully communicated to his disciples. One discovered that every being had a particular animating soul, and from this absurd supposition explained every appearance in nature. Another taught, that the stars are gods, and that the human soul is nothing but a vapour, which passeth from one body to another, to expiate in the body of a brute, the crimes which it had committed in that of a man. One said, that the universe

6 MISCELLANEOUS

was formed by blind fate; and that all the events in it are caused by fatal necessity. Another, that the world is eternal, and that there was no time when heaven and earth, and all the elements began to be. One said, that there is nothing certain; that there is no real distinction between justice and injustice, and that vice and virtue are only arbitrary terms: another, that the soul is mortal, and that there is no Providence: that an infinite number of atoms wandering in the universal void, meeting by chance, produced this world; in which, of consequence, there was nothing made with any design, not even the feet to walk, nor the eyes to see. Scarcely can we conceive any thing low, false, or dangerous to virtue, which disgraced not their divinity. And even the parts in it that were good and pure could only be known to the philosophers themselves. The people were incapable of comprehending their speculations, or of searching for truth through all those mazes of error which passion and prejudice

judice had drawn around her. A man of common abilities might indeed draw from the works of nature, some of those consequences on which the body of natural religion is founded: but only geniuses of the first rank were able to penetrate and dispel the darkness which concealed them all. For this some shorter method was necessary, some method proportioned to minds of every degree. An authority acknowledged infallible by all men was requisite, and a revelation founded on proofs of which all men could judge. Such a short method philosophy could not furnish, and it is only discovered by revelation. The reasonings of no mortal could pretend to such infallible authority; and it is only to be ascribed to the voice of God, addressed to those that believe in his religion.

But, because we are certain, that by the preaching of the Christian revelation, they are saved that believe, shall we conclude, that those were not saved who believed not, or who had no opportunity of

belief? Shall we condemn to eternal flames many millions of souls to whom this word of salvation was never sent? This conclusion has been adopted, rather rashly, by some merciless divines: but, as it is exceedingly shocking to every person of feeling, others have been induced to consider the question more calmly and charitably. It is undeniable, that in one sense, the conclusion is just, that a heathen, merely considered as such, could not be saved. We have seen, that what was called the religion of nature, was really insufficient for conducting men to salvation. "This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent." "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." In vain are some other passages of Scripture brought in opposition to these by the latitudinarian. In vain is the speech of St. Paul to the priest of Jupiter quoted, that "God never left himself without witness to the Gentiles, in doing them good."

good." For there is surely a great difference between giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and communicating the lively faith, the sanctifying spirit, the saving hope. In vain too is quoted the speech of the same Apostle to the Athenians in Areopagus--that the nations of men on the face of all the earth, should have sought the unknown God, who was not far from every one of them. For it is one thing to find God as the author of life and motion, and the Father of the human race; and another to find him the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who hath given us his own eternal Son. The heathen, considered merely as such, could not be saved, because the religion of nature was unfit for salvation. But certainly it was possible for God to favour virtuous heathens with communications superior to natural religion; and that he would do so, the spirit of Christianity will not suffer us to doubt. It is not to be believed, that he who takes cognizance of the death of a sparrow and the fall of a hair, should suffer

fer many worthy spirits to be lost for ever, when by the divine impulse of a moment they might be secured of endless happiness!

Very liberal sentiments on the subject are to be found, where some would least look for them, in the writings of the early fathers, and in those of the first reformers. Clement of Alexandria maintains, that philosophy was the teacher of the Greeks, to bring them to the faith of the Messiah, as the law was to the Jews. St. Chrysostom avers, that those who before the coming of Jesus Christ despised idolatry, and adored the Creator of all things, were saved, even without faith. St. Augustin goes yet farther, and scruples not to put the Erythrean Sibyl in heaven. Zuinglius, the Swiss reformer, places Theseus, Hercules, Numa, Aristides, and Cato, among the Patriarchs and Apostles. These opinions I will not undertake to defend, but they are unquestionably on the safe side. Who shall dare to set bounds to the mercies of the Eternal? Let us detest the doctrines which incline men to narrow the gate of heaven, and to deal
dam-

damnation round the world. Let us renounce for ever the theology which builds its glory on inexorable torture; whose doctors cannot conceive how they shall be happy in heaven, unless they know that myriads of their fellow-creatures are burning in the unquenchable fire.

But while we thus extend our charity to all men, and despair of the salvation of none, even of those to whom the œconomy of grace was never known, it becomes us to be sensible of the value of that divine œconomy, to attach ourselves to it inviolably, and to draw thence all those helps and lights, which, by the speculations of our reason, we seek for in vain. Above all, we ought to search in that œconomy alone for remedies to the wounds which are made in our souls by sin. It is a most common error of our age to frame arbitrary systems of religion, and to look for the mercy of God in places where it is not to be found. In the Gospel alone a wise Christian will seek it. Nothing could be more uncertain and fluctuating than the
salva-

salvation of mankind, if it depended only on certain metaphysical speculations concerning the bounty of the Supreme Being. The notions which we have of him comprehend, indeed, unlimited charity: the productions of nature, and the conduct of Providence, agree to assure us, that he delights to manifest himself by blessing his creatures. But the attributes of the Deity are to us unfathomable abysses, in which we infallibly lose ourselves, when we enter them presumptuously without a guide. Nature and Providence are full of difficulties, which our weak reason cannot disentangle. The idea of justice enters into our notion of the Supreme Being, no less than that of mercy. And this after all is certain, that we have been criminal, and that our consciences, in spite of all the subtleties of self-love, pronounceth the sentence of our condemnation.

God himself hath condescended to clear those doubts, and remove those distracting thoughts that tear our souls. He hath assured us, in his revelation, that he is merciful,

merciful, and shewn us whereon to found our dependence on his mercy: this is the new alliance made with man in the Gospel. Wo to us, if we abandon those fountains of living water, which he opens to us in religion, and make to ourselves broken cisterns of our speculations and systems! The sacred books which are in all our hands, and which contain the substance of what inspired men preached, these point out to us the immoveable foundation of hope. They assure us clearly, and in a style intelligible to minds capable of the slightest attention, that it is Jesus Christ who hath reconciled us with God; that he is set forth a satisfaction for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; and that he is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. To God, therefore, let us go, by him, and by him alone.

S E R M O N II.

ST. JOHN vii. 24.

JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO THE AP-
PEARANCE.

TO judge the actions and consciences of mankind is the right of God alone, as the sole Creator and universal Lord: yet there is no error more common in human life than the usurpation of this right. Every man forms to himself a kind of tribunal within his own breast, at which, as if vested with full authority, he arraigns without scruple, and condemns without mercy, the conduct of his neighbour; by these means, as far as he can, infringing the prerogative of the Almighty, and pretending to a power which properly and strictly belongs to the Most High.

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That power which the Saviour of the world himself shall at last use only by way of delegation, that power we usurp and exercise without the least shadow of title. "Who art thou," says the great St. Paul, "who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." As if he had said, Why dost thou judge that which concerns thee not? And why are thy views extended beyond the limits that Providence has set them? The man whose conduct thou censurest; whose actions, and even, perhaps, intentions, thou condemnest, is he thy subject? Hast thou in nature any superiority over him? Shalt thou give account of his life, or answer to God for him? If so, thy right of judging him is good; and 'tis thy duty to exercise it in the spirit of prudence and of charity. But, since nothing of all this is the case, where is the need for thy opinions and decisions with regard to his merit? Leave him to his natural judge, and respect in thy brother the right which he has of being responsible

sponsible to God alone. If he does well, thou mayest then rejoice in his happiness; and if he does ill, the blame is not thine. But, if it is thy practice rashly to condemn him, whatever he does, thou art criminal: for, if he does well, thy judgment is false and scandalous; and even if he does ill, it is unjust, because it is usurped.

From this principle it appears, that of actions which admit the smallest place for doubt, it is dangerous to affirm any thing hastily; since we have no right of judging our brethren at all, far less of judging them rashly. And, even supposing this right to be in us, we are but poorly qualified to exercise it, both from want of knowledge, and of integrity.

To know without judging, is often modesty and virtue: but to judge without knowledge, is always indiscretion and rashness. If this be true in general, it is eminently so in the case of despising and condemning our neighbour; and therefore the disadvantageous judgments which

we

we make of our neighbours are, for the most part, rash and criminal; because they have seldom that degree of evidence and certainty which would be necessary for their justification. What is more common in the world than to judge by appearances, and even by vague report? than to judge of men's intentions by their actions, and that with precipitation and presumption? than to carry our examinations farther than is necessary; and, when we can see no farther with certainty, to set loose our imagination? All these are sources of the false judgments which we make of each other; which disturb, and in a great measure destroy, the peace of society.

It has been observed by some, that, instead of judging men's characters from a partial view of their actions, we ought to judge of actions from the knowledge of men's characters. Without insisting upon this point, which is infinite, it is certain that there are numberless people in the world, who, at the bottom, are nothing of what they often appear to be, and often

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appear

appear nothing of what they really are: many who, from a certain negligence not easy to be described, make little shew of their good qualities: many whose whole study it is to disguise the depraved and fordid dispositions which they have, and to adorn themselves with the semblance of graces which they have not: many whose visible faults and imperfections are compensated by a fund of solid merit; and who, under an awkward or absurd exterior, possess the most excellent virtues. To judge of those people by appearances would be plainly unjust; every idea would be distorted and false. But how much better is it to imitate that Being who in all things ought to be the object of our imitation? The sacred historian tells us “that the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” This God, who is light itself, and in whom is no darkness; who possesseth the fulness of knowledge, and of wisdom; when he is about to judge and condemn, is he satisfied with

with a superficial view of the outward state of his creatures? No! he goes to the inmost recesses of the soul: he penetrates even to the joints and marrow: he searcheth the profoundest depths of the heart. Such is the conduct of a just and a wise God. But we, blind and inconsiderate mortals, judge our brother, attack the probity of this one, and the reputation of that other, upon no foundation but mere appearances: never once reflecting, that he upon whom our censure falls, and whom we believe so worthy of blame, is the very man for whom we should have the highest esteem, if we knew him thoroughly; that, under those appearances which deceive us, there may be treasures of innocence, and of merit; and that the exterior, which offends us so much, may be no more than a veil of humility, with which God is sometimes pleased to cover the most valuable gifts. What reproaches have we not to make ourselves in this matter, for so often con-

founding virtue with vice, for so often mistaking a vain phantom for a real existence.

But it is said we cannot possibly judge of men's characters and intentions any other way than by their actions. For this very reason, we ought not to judge of them at all; at least never rashly. It is evident, that the same action may be done from a hundred different motives; and that each of those motives may give rise to different, and even opposite judgments.

When the penitent Magdalene poured out her perfumes at our Saviour's feet, we believe her motive was piety, and yet we find she was accused by some of prodigality. When the Saviour of the world himself suffered the company of sinners, for the gracious purpose of their conversion, we perceive he was suspected by some of joining in their sinful practices. We see actions, the same in substance, praised and condemned by the Spirit of God, according to the diversity of the motives which produced them. Pharaoh loaded the Israelites in
Egypt

Egypt with insupportable toils, and Moses destroyed a part of them in the desert: but the one acted from a spirit of tyranny, the other from an emotion of zeal for religion. The idolators committed sacrilege by killing the prophets; and the prophets made sacrifices to God, by exterminating the idolators. God himself, as well as Judas, delivered up our Lord to the Jews; but God in this shewed forth his infinite mercy, and Judas was guilty of the blackest perfidy. What do we learn from these examples, but that only the intentions of men give a character to their actions; and that those intentions being known to God alone, it is extreme rashness for us to pretend to discern them. Why then shall we dare, when two opposite motives can be assigned for an action, to hold that which is worst, though perhaps disclaimed by the actor, and exclude the other entirely? Would it not be better to leave the examination of those hidden things to the Judge of the universe, and preserve ourselves from falling into errors which may be fatal to the

peace of our consciences? remembering always, that man, in a thousand conjunctures, is so little consistent with himself, that one can never with certainty judge of his actions by his intentions, nor of his intentions by his actions.

But frequently we judge from the report of others; and in this case we deem ourselves more at liberty, and pronounce with greater assurance. Yet we have, in this too, the example of God to condemn us. The abominations of Sodom and of Gomorrah were become public, the noise of them was spread on the earth, and had ascended even to heaven. Did God immediately condemn those impious places? did he instantly pour down his fiery vengeance on the abandoned wretches who dwelt there? No! although the cry of those cities was great, and their sin very grievous, yet said God, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come unto me; and, if not, I will know." He seemed not even to trust to his ordinary providence:

providence : but descended, to have an immediate, and more distinct knowledge of the matter. Are these the measures which we pursue ? When reports are spread injurious to the honour of any person, do we say, like God, I will go down and see ; I will instruct myself in the source of those things ; I will endeavour to distinguish truth from falsehood ; and, till then, I will beware of judging finally ? Very different is our conduct. Those rumours, however frivolous they be, are favourably received. A malignant curiosity makes us listen to them ; and a fatal credulity makes us find them probable, though perhaps most incongruous and absurd. We give credit to people, some malicious, some ignorant, some trifling, some insincere ; and, upon the word of such informers, we make judgments for which we ourselves must answer. They give us the silly history of their suspicions ; and those suspicions, retailed by us, become truths. Though convinced that there is no information more unfaithful than those re-

ports which are spread in secret, yet from this very source we gather a thousand false opinions, that impoison the heart, and become the seeds of hatred and endless division.

Besides these great errors and defects in our knowledge, we are moreover deficient in that integrity which is necessary for judging impartially. We judge according to the desire of our heart, and not according to the light of our understanding, however faint that light may be. We judge from prejudice, from aversion, from interest, from innumerable other motives, that corrupt the purest reason.

One illustrious instance of this will be sufficient to shew it in the clearest light. The Pharisees refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ, because they were interested, ambitious, and jealous of the power which they had acquired, or rather usurped, over the people. When the Son of God therefore appeared, they regarded him as an obstacle to their designs, as the enemy of their

their hypocrisy, and the destruction of their sect: for that reason, it was their interest to decry and defame him. His credit was incommodious to them: there was no more needful to ruin him in their esteem; and to make them think of him all that the most envenomed hatred was capable to suggest. In vain did the world hold him for a prophet: the Pharisees declared they knew him to be a sinner. But how did they know this? Because they wished it to be so; and their interest was the rule of their judgment. This is a very natural picture of the judgments of the world in general. We judge of men, not from the *merit* which distinguisheth *them*, but from the *interest* which governs *us*: not from the good or ill qualities which they really possess; but from the good or ill which may accrue to us from them. Hence arise our most flagrant violations of justice; our blind regard for one, and capricious aversion to another; our malicious censures of the most deserving, and extravagant praises of the most indifferent.

Interest,

Interest, that hangs like an impervious cloud before our eyes, that fetters our reason, that debaseth our hearts, rendering them sordid and selfish, how does it destroy every heavenly virtue! and what wounds does it daily make in the peace of society, by the false impressions it imposeth on our minds!

To judge his neighbour, then, a man ought to be free of all prejudice, free of all affection, of all passion, aversion, attachment, resentment, hope, fear, and every modification of interest. But where is the man that will agree to this description? Who can give such a character to his own heart? Since therefore we can attain to so little of this perfection, our wisest course is to hold by the Evangelic law; and judge not, that we may not be judged: or, if we must judge, let us judge our own hearts, and do it severely; for there we may find sufficient matter for examination, for correction, and reproof. But let us, in the true spirit of Christian charity, judge favourably of every man, till we are forced to do
other-

otherwise. By these means shall we not only escape the disorders that are connected with uncharitable judgment, but also the dreadful consequences which immediately follow it. For one sin here calls on another in rapid succession: rash judgment produceth calumny; calumny begets resentment: this brings on animosity, hatred, and vengeance. These it is certainly our duty and interest to avoid: and these we may avoid, by faithfully remembering, that he who shews mercy to his brethren shall deserve mercy to himself; and that to judge the actions and consciences of mankind is the right of God alone.

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S E R M O N III.

2 KINGS, i. 3.

IS IT NOT BECAUSE THERE IS NOT A
GOD IN ISRAEL, THAT YE GO TO
ENQUIRE OF BAAL-ZEBUB THE GOD
OF EKRON?

ONE of the chief peculiarities in the history of the Hebrews, is the frequent apostacies of their kings. Princes and leading men in other nations generally embraced and encouraged the religion of their ancestors, if not from motives of conviction, at least from reasons of sound policy, and the love of peace: but the governors of that remarkable people, by a strange infatuation, seemed rather eagerly to hunt after religious innovations. Of forty-three monarchs, not more than seven

ven or eight are found blameless in this matter.

It is not easy to discover the cause of such a perpetual falling off. A political cause it could not be; for every worldly advantage was on the side of the national religion. If concord, unanimity, obedience, fortitude; if these virtues held any value in the eyes of a Hebrew king, he could not take a surer way of making them flourish among his subjects, than by favouring the institutions of Moses. What can we conceive better contrived than the Mosaic law, for diffusing strict justice among the people, for inspiring them with the most enthusiastic love of their country, contempt for the superiority of their enemies, and unshaken dependence on one great object of confidence for the protection and increase of their temporal prosperity? But all those good and noble effects were directly counteracted by the introduction of a wild and miserable idolatry, gathered from every nation under heaven, attended with unmeaning, fantastic, and often

often abominable observances. Instead then of assembling with united tribes at Salem's courts, to join in one great sacrifice, and adore one God supreme, some were in the house of Baal, others before the calves in Bethel, some on high places prostrate to Astarte queen of heaven, and others in groves abusing themselves in honour of Peor and Thamuz. From a people thus torn and distracted in their religious sentiments, thus running loose after every despicable superstition that could disgrace human nature, what virtue, what glory was to be expected? We need not wonder to see them soon practising the vilest vices, and soon yielding their captive necks to the yoke of those nations by whom their minds were already enslaved.

It may be alledged, that it is easy thus to reason upon events that are past, to trace the progress of errors, and unfold the causes of political revolutions: whereas, it is little more than groping in the dark, to pretend to ascertain the future effect of measures relating to the government of a state;

state; nothing being more vague and unsatisfactory than reasonings on political contingencies; and that therefore it is probable the Hebrew kings foresaw not the disastrous consequences of their idolatrous practices. But they were not left merely to the direction of speculative opinions: they had experience, a far better guide, to inform them. They might have seen, especially the latest of the race, a long train of constant appearances; the same misfortunes always originating from the same cause; and, from the day that Aaron first formed the idol of gold in Horeb, ruin and defeat invariably succeeding a desertion of the God of Israel.

Ignorance therefore was not the parent of their sin, but perverseness and depravity of heart: and we shall find no satisfactory account of their propensity to encourage strange religions, except by ascribing it to the corruption of their morals. The faith which forbade and condemned their vices, became a heavy and disgusting yoke: they hastened therefore
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to throw it off, and flew to embrace a new divinity more indulgent to the gratification of their darling passions. Actions, which by the Mosaic law were held out as objects of detestation, by the new system were allowed and encouraged. From "Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood," they learned to sport with human misery, and exult over scenes of torture. "Chemos, the obscene dread of Ammon's sons," authorized their debaucheries and impurities. Belial sanctified their violence and oppression. Orus and Isis confirmed their gross conceptions of the eternal Being, by representing deities in brutish forms.

For those the race of Israel oft forsook
 Their living strength, and unfrequented left
 His righteous altar, bowing lowly down
 To bestial gods, for which their heads as low
 Bow'd down in battle, sunk before the spear
 Of despicable foes.

Thus Solomon, in his dotage, built
 temples and erected shrines for the idols
 of his favourite mistresses: for which his
 kingdom

kingdom was rent from his posterity and given to his servant. Thus Jeroboam set up the golden calves, and for that crime his house was exterminated, their bodies given to the dogs and the fowls of the air, and his very name made a by-word, a standard of iniquity for other wicked princes to be compared to. Thus Ahab raised an altar to Rimmon, and protected the worshippers of Baal: he lived miserable, and died without honour. Thus Ahaziah sent to enquire concerning his health to the god of Ekron, and had the doom of death returned him from the God of the universe. Thus many of them followed, obstinate in rebellion, and insensible to the plagues which Heaven inflicted on them; till Zedekiah, the last of the impious race, was driven from his throne, his kingdom destroyed, his subjects led captive to distant lands, and himself, with loss of sight, condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

All those unhappy deeds were recorded for the instruction of succeeding ages; that the vices and misfortunes of the dead

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might prove warnings to the living. The kings of Israel, therefore, though now two thousand years in their graves, may afford us lessons of morality. In fact, if we take away their regal character, if we consider them merely as men like ourselves, there will be found nothing very uncommon or particular in their conduct. A race of more imprudent kings, perhaps, never existed; but every age produces a race of as wicked men. Apostacies at this day are as common as ever. Persons might now frequently be found, if we could read the heart, secretly abjuring the God of their fathers, forsaking the worship of their innocent years, and labouring hard to eradicate every principle which the careful hand of education had fixed in their minds. The state of the world is such, that every man who converses much in it, is at a certain period exposed to many and dangerous assaults upon his faith. Numerous temptations lurk around, soliciting him to criminal gratification. Pernicious books are thrown in his way,

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to defile his imagination with a thousand impure ideas; by descriptions fatally pleasing to instruct him in the theory of every vice; and by detestable sophistries to lull his understanding asleep. With those are joined idle and airy companions; men who think themselves born only to search for pleasure; and, deceived by the transitory glow of health, and the uncertain gleam of prosperity, boldly affirm, that they have found her in the bewitching mazes of dissipation. The giddy youth in a fatal hour believes them, relishes their brilliant fallies of wit against maxims and opinions which he once held sacred, deserts the temple and the worship of his God, and flies to join the frantic orgies of these new idolaters.

Wherein differs this apostate Christian from Ahaziah, or any other infidel among the Hebrews? Is it because there is no God revealed in the Gospel, that he runs to seek one in scepticism and deism, and all those confused unprofitable systems invented by vain or vicious men? Is it be-

cause there is nothing divine in the doctrines and precepts of Christ Jesus, that he goes to enquire of—names which it were blasphemy to rank with his? No, these are not the causes of his wandering. Every rational power of his soul, every uncorrupted feeling of his heart, will bear witness to the divinity of the Christian law, and the Christian lawgiver. But those powers and feelings have been long waxing feeble, and no longer possess the ascendant which nature designed them. Baser principles have usurped their place, and now assume the direction of his conduct. The courses into which he is by them engaged, accord not with the purity of the Christian faith; and therefore he regards that faith as a weary weight, and wishes to leave it behind him. Another system offers, finely contrived to favour the corruption of his heart, and throw his understanding into a most profound lethargy, which therefore he receives with avidity, as a man in a paroxysm of bodily pain greedily swallows a stupifying medicine.

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Thus the causes of apostacy, we see, are nearly alike in every age: its consequences too are extremely similar, being deceitful and ruinous both to soul and body. The man who deserts the Christian faith and worship, no doubt, thinks himself by that desertion more free. Freedom is one of those ideal beings, which, like many other objects as unsubstantial, the sons of men delight to pursue. If the laws against theft and murder were abolished, we would certainly be more free: but no person will say we would be more happy. Restraint is necessary for man; and we might as well talk of perpetual health, or earthly immortality, as of absolute freedom. I take it for granted, that the restraints imposed by Christianity are favourable to human happiness. The man who should go about to prove the contrary, would find himself engaged in a Herculean labour. He, therefore, who removes them from among his principles of action, breaks down one bulwark, erected by Heaven against the inroads of affliction and misery.

He is now more at liberty to hurt himself and his fellow-creatures. He becomes so far a sort of outlaw, who will make depredations on all, wherever he is encouraged by the probability of temporal impunity. But even in this fancied emancipation from restraint, he will one day find himself deceived. It is a question extremely problematical, whether any principle of belief which the human mind receives in early life can be afterwards totally obliterated. Men of good sense and knowledge are often unable to destroy the foolish association of the ideas of darkness and ghastly terrors, which had been beaten into their minds by weak and superstitious instructors. If it be so with the filliest of things, what must it be with those that are greatest, best, and most awful? Will there not come an hour when they shall break through the mist of delusion, when they shall dart a ray too intensely bright for guilt to bear, and discover to the trembling sinner what havock hath been made by vice in his heart? He cannot always doze and dream: age or sickness will

will infallibly break the spell. Then will he discover the vanity of his idols, and curse in despair the gods he had chosen. Arguments which owed their strength to luxuriant health, and objections which laughter alone enforced, will then be of little avail. The beautiful style of one infidel, the poignant sarcastic wit of another, the dark insidious sophistries of a third, will be equally vain, and equally the objects of his execration. A jest will no more alleviate the tortures of remorse, nor a florid declamation remove the terrors of conscious guilt.

God of truth and mercy! guard us for ever from a fate so terrible. Enable us still to hoard up with care a few fixed principles, as land-marks to steer by through life's perilous voyage; as beacons to cheer us when the night of age falls; as anchors to grasp at when the shock of death consigns to dissolution our perishable frame.

S E R M O N IV.

COLOSS. iv. 6.

LET YOUR SPEECH BE ALWAYS WITH
GRACE.

IT has been observed by those who have made human nature their study, that men are seldom content with mediocrity. In our vices and virtues we generally run to extremes, despising the safe, though humble medium. To build up one virtue we throw down another; and to shun one vice we run into the opposite one. This maxim, which is verified in most of the actions of men, is particularly so in those familiar conversations, which are permitted by religion, necessary for society, and for which we seem to be formed by God himself. If we consider
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V. the conduct of men in this respect, we shall find hardly any thing but excess and extremes. On one side, we may see persons of a wild and savage disposition, carrying faces of rigour and austerity into the most innocent companies; declaiming, without end, against the manners of the age; opposing all; offended at all; and condemning all, by their own infallible judgment. On the other side, are those who, to shun this extreme, neglect their religion; imagining, that, to please the world, they must put off their Christianity, and give to all their expressions an air of libertinism. Nothing is so rare as that wise mixture of gravity and sweetness, of piety and affability, together, which can keep inviolate the rights of religion, without hurting those of society; and pay what is due to society, without offending religion: yet it is the wise mixture which we are called to practise by the Spirit of God; this is the art of speaking which the Gospel teacheth. "Let your speech be alway with grace, and seasoned with salt;"

salt;" that is, let it be solid, and let it be agreeable. The Christian religion forbids not absolutely, as some have imagined, every idle word; that is, every kind of discourse whose immediate good tendency cannot be perceived; for it forbids no innocent recreation, of which these discourses are a species. I might also observe, that the passage which records the threatening against idle words, is proved by the most eminent commentators to be falsely translated; so that we ought not to read *idle*, but *wicked*, or *pernicious words*. But the meaning of both these passages is clearly this: that our discourse ought always to be innocent; and, for the most part, employed about grave and useful matters.

Some people seem to think that our churches and closets are the only places proper for solid reflection: a mistake which occasions the loss of many a precious moment. Our souls are of themselves but too apt to wander; and therefore, instead of industriously diverting their attention,

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we ought to seize every opportunity of fixing it on serious thought. Having been at church, for example, our discourse may be usefully employed upon whatever has made an impression upon our minds, by which those impressions will be rendered stronger and more lasting. Having seen the death of a friend, or assisted at his funeral; we may take occasion to reflect on the inconstancy of human things, the vanity of life, and the happiness of a good death. Having read a book of instruction; we may impart a share of the knowledge we have acquired from it to those with whom we converse. By such means might every company be turned into a school of learning, in which every one, without affectation, might communicate to his brethren his knowledge and his virtues.

“ But, this is to forbid us all the pleasures of life,” it will be said; “ must we always bear a visage of gravity; and never open our mouths but to vent some sage observation, or sentence of morality? Must we be condemned to eternal melancholy?”

choly?" No, certainly! for, is joy incompatible with piety? or is piety so much our enemy as to poison all the pleasures with which it may be connected?

After all, what pleasures can result from those vain discourses which consume so great a portion of human life, especially of the lives of the great and the gay? Were a person who had lived sequestered from the haunts of men to hear at once the confused noise which ariseth from a troop of those who speak a great deal of nothing, he would surely conclude, that this multitude of words afforded great pleasure, both to the speakers and the hearers. But who in the least acquainted with life can fall into such a mistake? What pleasure can a man of sense and taste find in those idle observations that are made on the most common appearances of nature: in those dull circles where the falling of the rain and the blowing of the wind are subjects of disquisition: in those visits of ceremony, which are equally burthen-

burthenfome to thofe that pay, and to thofe that receive them? Will thefe be preferred to a decent converfation, which is pleafant in the mean time, and gives pleafure to reflection? Certainly not! The pleafure of converfation, therefore, is founded chiefly upon its folidity.

But let us remember, moreover, that our “ fpeech muft be alway with grace:” it muft not be offensive nor difagreeable to our companions. The caufes of difguft and trouble in converfation feem to be principally thefe, ridicule, felf-conceit, difputation, obftinacy, and curiofity: oppofed to which, there are virtues or graces from whence fpring all the charms of converfation; the graces of complaifance, of humility, of moderation, of docility, and of difcretion.

Exceffive raillery, or ridicule, is always difguffing in converfation. At times, this talent is agreeable, when moderately ufed: but it is a dangerous weapon, and often hurtful to its owner. Who loves to fee himfelf made ridiculous? What man can

can bear to have his weakness discovered in public? There needs no abstract meditation to prove this. The feelings of every man bear witness to its truth; even of him who possesseth this faculty; else why cannot he bear to be ridiculed in his turn? Why sinks he down in sad silence, when attacked by a superior genius in that way? Why is all his vivacity gone, and his wit disappeared, if it is not that every one loves a certain degree of respect?

To these offences we oppose the grace of complaisance: a grace which is well known to the men of the world; and of which they know well how to make their advantage, whether in conciliating the favour of a superior, or in acquiring the friendship of inferiors and equals. See with what address they can shew us to ourselves in the best light! See with what dexterity they can entertain us with subjects that please and interest us! And shall Christian charity yield to worldly politeness?

The second fault that hurts conversation is self-confidence. What is less supportable

portable than a man, who, taking himself for a genius of the first rank, puts forth his own infallibility as the test of every truth; who would have all his words pass for oracles, and his judgment be the last resort, from which there lies no appeal? What aggravates the injustice of this character is, that those decisive people are commonly most ignorant: their ignorance, indeed, is the cause of their conceit and precipitation. An ignorant person, who never perhaps sounded the full depth of any question; who knows neither the strength of proofs, nor the force of difficulties; who sees things only superficially: such a one will imagine, with great facility, that he has clear ideas of all, and perfect knowledge of what he thinks the circle of the sciences. He knows nothing of doubt or hesitation; to doubt is pitiful and mean. A man of sound understanding, on the contrary, knows so well the weakness of the human mind, and knows so well by experience his own failings, that those reflections

tions are always a sufficient counterpoise to pride. He proposeth his thoughts only as problems to be examined, not as decisions to be followed; and this is what I have called the grace of humility in conversation. We must submit our opinions to the discussion of those to whom we propose them. We must leave to every one the liberty of thinking as he sees good: remembering, that if we have reason, others have it also; if we have knowledge, others have it in like manner; if we have considered any matter, others may have considered it as well as we. We must even propose the things that we are most strongly convinced of, in such a manner as to shew that we only speak from a conviction of truth, and not from self-conceit: thus putting in practice that lesson of the Apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

Bitter disputation is another cause of trouble in conversation. In all such we ought

ought to yield in time, and even when we are on the right side: to content ourselves with knowing the truth, when those to whom we offer it shut their eyes against it. The reason of this maxim is, that a man who refuseth his assent to a proposition sufficiently demonstrated, will refuse it more violently in proportion as proofs are brought. The pride of his heart, and not the weakness of his understanding, was the cause of his refusal; and, therefore, by persisting to shew him the truth, we enrage his pride the more we confound his mistake: whereas, by giving his passion time to cool, he may return to himself, and be ashamed of his error. St. Paul gives us an admirable example in this: "To the Jews, I became as a Jew: to them that are without law, as without law: to the weak, I became as weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Why did he so? Was it from dread of opposition, or from laxity of principle? No! Never servant was more zealous for the interest of his master! Never warrior was more ar-

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dent for the glory of his prince! It was from moderation: it was from charity.

Obstinacy, too, is incompatible with the grace of which I speak. To support an opinion, only because we first advanced it; to heap absurdity upon absurdity, rather than renounce the first one; to be deceived a thousand times rather than acknowledge one deception; what can be more opposite to the peace of social converse? How much better is it to open our eyes to the light, when it meets them; and, by a sincere retraction, acknowledge that our design is to learn, rather than to make a parade of our learning.

Finally, curiosity, blameably exerted by indiscreet questions, is hurtful to conversation: such questions as confine and hamper the mind of him we interrogate: such as drive him to the hateful dilemma of either not answering, or of belying his real sentiments. Too much interestedness in the affairs of our neighbour, is sometimes less supportable than absolute indifference. When, in spite of himself, we would enter
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into one's confidence, we shew ourselves animated, not so much by a spirit of love and charity, as of indiscreet and prying curiosity: a vice with which St. Paul reproacheth the widows of his time; and, in their person, condemns and forbids to all succeeding Christians.

These graces which I have mentioned, are among the number of those that are little regarded, at least as religious perfections; and these offences of the tongue are thought to involve very small degrees of guilt: but for that reason they ought to be avoided with peculiar care. Great crimes have a sort of repelling virtue, (if I may so speak;) their horror drives us from them; and, if we fall into them by surprise, we fly instantaneously to repentance: but the lesser sins, as they alarm us not so much, can every day make imperceptible progress, and every day raise some obstacle to that great work, for the perfection of which we received our being from God. That our speech may be always with grace, we ought to be cautious in the choice of

our companions. Rarely shall a man pass his life with an evil-speaker, without contracting the habit of evil-speaking. As there is no sinner so obstinately hardened, but may be shaken by the company of the good; so there is no good man so confirmed in virtue, but may be ruined by the company of the wicked. Another useful rule in the art of speaking with grace, is, the art of silence. To speak a great deal, and to reflect on what we say, are things incompatible: but if we speak without reflection, our speech shall certainly not be with grace. "A fool," says Solomon, "is full of words; but the end of his talk is mischievous madness."

The last and grand rule of regulating the tongue, is to regulate the heart.—
"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." In vain shall we think to prevent the effects, if we do not remove the cause: in vain shall we attempt to purify the stream, if the fountain remains impure: in vain, by constraining ourselves, shall our "words be softer than

than oil, while war is in our heart:" constraint cannot long be borne; and the heart will insensibly guide the tongue. Would we then shun impertinence, bitterness, obscenity, calumny, rash judgment, and every offence of the tongue? We must begin by the heart; and establish there the love of God, which is charity, in full sway. If we love piety, if we love virtue, our discourse shall be always pious and virtuous. May the Almighty enable us continually to think and speak such things as be right-ful.

S E R M O N V.

J E R. xxiii. 24.

DO NOT I FILL HEAVEN AND EARTH?
SAITH THE LORD.

FEW things there are which we see in nature, but what are mysterious to us. Outward appearances we know as facts; but when we attempt to enquire into the real causes of things, we find our researches quickly at an end. We quickly perceive, that the human mind was not made for a full comprehension of subjects; but that all the modes of perception with which it is endued, were intended, by the wise contrivance of God, to answer other particular purposes. Our sensations give us no intelligence of the essence of those material objects which produce them, nor, indeed, immediately of their existence itself:

self: and though we have an inward consciousness of our own existence, our perceptions, and volitions, yet what the intimate nature is of that self-consciousness, we cannot understand. The Father of our spirits, "from whom every good gift comes down," hath given us such powers of knowledge as are sufficient for directing our practice, though not for comprehending fully the nature of any thing which seems not requisite to the ends of our being. But least of all can we form any adequate notion of the Supreme Being himself: not only are the absolute perfections of his nature far beyond the reach of our understanding, but we have no immediate perception of them, as of other objects. Of sensible qualities, such as the figure, colour, and magnitude of bodies, we have distinct ideas; of our own rational faculties, we have a direct, intuitive knowledge; and also of moral qualities, as of goodness, justice, and gratitude, we have very clear apprehensions: but of the divine, incommunicable attributes, we have

not, nor can possibly have, any positive idea. In this present mortal state, therefore, our knowledge of the Deity is dark and imperfect, collected from his works and revelations by reasoning; a more difficult and unaffecting way than that of direct intuition. By reflecting on ourselves, on the constitution of our nature, with its various tendencies, affections, passions, and operations, and by considering external objects as perceived by our senses, we are led to a persuasion of his being, power, wisdom, and goodness. By this method of enquiry, we are also convinced, that God is intimately present with us, and with all beings in the universe: yet still it is only by the means of sensible effects, that we attain to this conviction. The divine nature and attributes themselves, the inward principle of the Almighty's various operations, "no man hath seen at any time, nor can see."—"Behold, I go forward," said Job, "but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but
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I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him." Hence it follows, and we find it so in experience, that the perfections of God, which are the most clearly manifested, and immediately exercised, in his works, are the best understood by us. We have much more distinct apprehensions of power, wisdom, and goodness, than of self-existence and infinity. The latter are not, nor can possibly be, represented by any image, nor is the idea of them conveyed by any discernible effect: the other have produced a resemblance of themselves in inferior agents, and characters of them may be traced in all the divine operations.

With regard, therefore, to those attributes which it is hardest for us to conceive, we shall still think and speak of them the most usefully, when, as far as it can be done, we consider them in relation to the works of God. Thus, we have a much better notion of the divine omnipresence, by considering it as filling the whole universe, as continually working in every part of actual creation,

creation, than by applying our thoughts to the abstract speculation of absolute immensity, or existence diffused through boundless space. And we find, that of the arguments which confirm this article of our faith, those which are taken metaphysically from principles of reason, give not such rest and satisfaction to the mind, as those which are drawn from more obvious views of nature; and that their general force of conviction is nearly in proportion to the notoriety, or simplicity, of their principles. So, one argument is taken from necessary existence—God is from all eternity: he, consequently, exists without any cause: he, therefore, necessarily *is*, and it is impossible that he should not *be*. But it is certain, that absolute necessity of existence excludes all relation to any one place more than another: for he who *is*, by necessity of nature, must *be* every where, for the same reason that he *is* any where; because, if he could be absent from any one place, he might be absent also from any other place, and so could have no necessary existence.

existence. To necessity of existence, all points of space are alike; and, therefore, it is equally necessary in them all. Again, wherever any being exerts his power, there he certainly exists: but we know that the divine power is exerted through the whole creation; we know also, that there is no point of space imaginable, beyond the limits of creation, in which this power cannot act; and if so, this power must be every where: consequently such Being must be every where, in the whole immensity of space.

This argument is held to be irrefragable: but there is another, at once more obvious, and more convincing. We see, in this vast creation, a power every where exerted, in pursuing a design that is perfectly uniform and consistent: we see it exerted at all times, and in all places; the same intentions are, by the same energy, advanced from age to age. The deepest enquiries into nature, and the latest improvements in natural knowledge, convince us, that this energy is necessary, not only
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to the production of every animal and vegetable, but even to the subsistence of the material world; and that without it, the cohesion of the parts of matter, in themselves distinct and separable, could not be accounted for, nor, therefore, the very existence of any material compound: so that matter supposeth a present power every where acting upon it. Accordingly, we perceive such a power every where, in this world; every where, in this system, of which our world is a part; and every where, as far as our discoveries can reach, through the whole heavens. Now, wherever this power is exerted, there is God; in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath. But if we know that he fills heaven and earth, we know that there can be no difficulty in supposing that he is present in all imaginable worlds, and in all imaginable space: for if the same simple and undivided Being can be present in several different places at once, he may be present in all places at once.

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In this kind of reasoning, from obvious and manifest appearances, the mind rests perfectly satisfied. And thus we conceive, that as in man there is one individual conscious self, that sees, hears, feels, and determines for the whole body; so in the universe (but in a manner infinitely more perfect) there is one conscious intelligent nature, which pervades the entire system, at once perceiving in every place, and presiding over all. Such a view of this amazing attribute, far from being a point of mere speculation, is indeed one of the most pleasing and useful thoughts that can enter the soul of man. The Psalmist significantly and happily expressed himself concerning it, when he said, " Lord, thou hast been the dwelling-place of thy people to all generations;" their eternal home. Through what changes of being we shall pass, we know not; in what worlds in the immensity of space our dwelling shall be assigned, we know as little: but every where is the Parent of our spirits present with us; and every where are we at home with him.

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Strange countries, and strange worlds, there may be, but no strange God. "Had I the command of universal nature, so that I could transport myself whither I pleased for a safe retreat; in vain should I attempt to avoid the presence of God. If I mount up to the extremities of this material world, even to the surface that parts it from the immense void, I should find myself there within the verge of his supreme dominion. If I descend to the darkness which is hid from all living, there I should be naked before him; no gloom nor obscurity is impenetrable to his all-searching eye. The swift wings of the morning would be heavy and slow, to bear me from his pursuing hand; and the shadows of night to him are as clear as the splendor of the noon-day sun." The holy Scriptures, indeed, represent him as dwelling in heaven, there preparing his throne, and there displaying his glory: but these expressions were never intended to signify, that his essential presence is limited to any one place, which is impossible; and they can relate to nothing else

else but particular manifestations of his glory. So he is, in heaven, particularly manifested to the happy spirits that dwell there; but still he is here as really as in heaven: not indeed visible to mortal eyes, yet as certainly present.

To every good mind this must be a joyful reflection. It is a noted observation, that in the company of one whom we esteem and love, we are sensible of a pleasure, which seems to communicate itself to all objects around us. Every thing with such a companion appears pleasing; the places where we are wont to converse, the fields, and walks, and every accustomed retreat, give us delight; a delight which is highly natural, and therefore highly satisfactory. Thus it is, that every thing which hath the least relation to the principal object of the heart, derives from it a charm. And why should not all nature appear to us delightful, as it is every where the seat of the divine presence; the seat of that presence which contains the perfection of grandeur and of beauty? Certainly, to reflect that
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this glorious presence is ever with us, that in every place, and in every circumstance, we see God, and have access to him, must not only give us a sensible feeling of pure delight, but also make all things around us put on a delightful aspect. God is here; and should not every thing rejoice as in his presence? Suppose him absent, and all substantial joy is that moment gone. Nature's beauties fade, her glories die, and the universe frowns like a gloomy and desolate wild. So the rising sun displays his beams, and the skies are filled with day; a thousand beautiful objects open to the eye, nature smiles on every hand, and the world appears a grand and delightful theatre: but when that fountain of light is withdrawn, and darkness hath invested the earth, nought then is seen but formless gloom, a blind and undistinguishable mass; the verdure of the fields, and the charming varieties that adorn them, the beauties of the rose and the violet, the majesty of the oak and the pine—all are lost.

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But very languid is this comparison, and very faint the representation it gives of the joy communicated by the sense of a present Divinity. The light of day discovers, indeed, beauties which are in objects; but it creates them not: whereas, it is the view of a creating and presiding Deity in all the parts of nature, which gives us secure and complete satisfaction. And when the whole universe is considered as the temple of God, as the seat of the original power and might, of the original order and harmony, of the original goodness and love; it then becomes every where delightful, and in every part receives additional dignity. To look on the beauty of opening flowers, gradually growing up to all their pride, is certainly pleasant, even to a superficial observer; but to discern the Creator's hand which adorns them in a manner so delightful, and to consider them as the contrivance of the eternal Mind, eloquently displaying his intention to please the children of men, this shews them in a very different, and in a much nobler light. Even the most for-

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midable appearances in nature, considered in this view, become easy to the imagination. If the thunders and the lightnings of heaven are conceived as having the Deity presiding in them; if the wild tempests and the tumultuous ocean are his servants, constantly under his eye, ever executing his pleasure, and having all their force measured by him; they cease then to be terrible, for they discover a power which must be always tempered with kindness, and directed by love. Can that appearance be terrible to a faithful and good mind, in which the eternal Father of all is perceived? Can the most awful displays of majesty strike with painful terror, while the God is seen, a God whose unchangeable goodness is our perfect security?—No! while we know ourselves to be under his indulgent care, and within the embraces of his arm, let the thunder rend the heavens, let the lightnings shatter the rocks, let earthquakes hurl the mountains from their seats, let the winds roar, and the ocean boil—still all is well, for here is our God; “ a
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God at hand, and not far off:" " it is I, be not afraid." In a word, the whole circuit of nature must be agreeable, and all that comes to pass must be for good, because the Divinity is every where. Here is dignity, and here is goodness! Let the heathens celebrate their gods of the hills and vallies, of their fountains and rivers, of their corn and wine; while we adore the one infinite, universally-animating, and governing Mind, who presides over all, and whose tender mercy is over all his works.

S E R M O N VI.

M I C A H, vi. 9.

HEAR YE THE ROD, AND WHO HATH
APPOINTED IT.

NOTHING is more apparently essential to the character of the Supreme Being than perfect holiness: he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity. As every man's own conscience, approving the just laws of his nature, is a witness to the moral rectitude of the great Lawgiver, and leads to the expectation of his impartial judgment; so the remarkable interposition of divine Providence in the affairs of the world, by inflicting severe punishments for the obstinate wickedness of men, hath been universally acknowledged. Great and desolating

desolating strokes, such especially as were sudden and surprising, not expected according to the ordinary course of nature, have been always attributed to the immediate avenging hand of God, as a signification to men, even in their state of trial, of his final design to condemn impenitent sinners, when the righteous shall be saved. Other catastrophes of nations and cities, which had not such miraculous circumstances, have nevertheless been accounted for by the wisest of men in the same manner, as intended for examples of punishing obstinate wickedness and dissolute luxury, that “by the judgments of God which are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness.” But the same uniformity is by no means observable in the effect of those judgments, as in their cause: on the contrary, by the sad indolence or blindness of men, they are often almost totally disregarded. Not that it can be said we are absolutely unconcerned at the strokes of Providence which we see in the world; stupidity cannot carry us

quite so far; yet it is certain, that we seldom consider them with such attention as we ought. Wars, plagues, famines, when we do not feel them ourselves, or when we feel them but slightly, make very weak impressions on our minds: we speak of them with the news of the times, and the conversation of the day; but we carry our reflections no farther, nor think of entering into the views of Providence. There are people on the earth so selfish, that they seem to be moved with nothing but what directly affects themselves: if their own private affairs sustain no damage; if their own little designs succeed to their wish; if their own groveling pleasures are not interrupted; they care not who is unhappy in the world, or what quarter of it is struck by the just hand of God. Such a character is at once seen to be despicable. In the afflictions which happen to mankind, every side deserves to be considered; and all is worthy of attention in those messages of divine vengeance. The philosopher may there find room for the most profound

profound speculations: to consider what unknown means the Almighty useth to shake the machine of the world, and to change, as it were in a moment, the face of society: to consider how the earth loseth its fertility; and, as if by some additional malediction, denies men food to support them in their toils: to consider how the salutary air is turned into poison, and destruction is wafted in every breeze. The politician may there admire the fall of kingdoms, and the overthrow of mighty empires: he may see vast armies, raised with difficulty and disciplined with care, in one short hour swept away by the tide of battle; or, which is still more mournful, dying in heaps through hunger or contagion. But the Christian looks much farther than these: he sees, “how terrible a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God:” he adores that Providence which directs all events, and without which a hair of the head cannot fall to the ground. In these distresses of others, he acknowledges the supreme dominion of

God, to whose irresistible word, war, pestilence, and famine, winds, waves, and storms, obey: he "hears the rod, and who hath appointed it:" he fears the same for himself; and, therefore, "prepares to meet his God."

Such are the reflections which this conduct of Providence ought to excite in a reasonable soul. It is a sad observation, however, that those men who above all boast of their reason, are least of all employed in such reflections: persons who indeed have knowledge, but growing "vain in their imaginations, their foolish hearts are darkened; and professing themselves to be wise, they become fools." More occupied with nature than with the God of nature, they hold it weakness to discover the finger of the Almighty in the afflictions of men: they ascribe every thing to second causes; and regard nature as the universal divinity, the sole directress of all events. In opposition to this error, it is easy to prove, that God is the author of these calamities, and that they are designed

signed by him for certain wise and good ends.

What is called nature, is either nothing, or it is an assemblage of beings created by God: either the effects of nature are nothing, or they are the consequences of the laws by which the Supreme Creator governs those beings; and, consequently, whatever we call natural effects, or actions of second causes, are the works of God, and the effects of laws established by him. This principle is incontestible to every one but an Atheist. For example: When we say that an earthquake is a natural effect, proceeding from a natural cause; what do we mean by this, but that there are, in the internal structure of the earth, certain kinds of matter, which, by their violent agitation, cause that dreadful phenomenon? But who formed the earth? who placed those inflammable substances beneath its surface? who established such laws of motion as make them burst forth at certain times? It was either God, or it was chance. If it was chance, this is the principle

principle of Atheism: if it was God, my principle is true. But moreover, the Almighty, in establishing these laws, and foreseeing their effects, designed them for certain determinate purposes. Nothing can be done by an all-wise Being but what is agreeable to his wisdom, nothing but what tends to some design, to make this character of wisdom shine forth in small as well as in great things. The wisest of men are not capable of this; because their finite minds can only take in a certain circle of objects: but it is far otherwise with the Father of spirits, who, in his boundless intelligence, comprehends innumerable ideas without confusion, and whose wisdom proposeth some fixed end in all his works. Consequently, the works of nature which he created, the effects of nature which he foresaw, make a part of his eternal counsel, and have every one their destination. To ascribe all events therefore to second causes; to discover no design of Providence in wars, in famines, and such like; and
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not to acknowledge in these the Author and the Lord of nature, is to be blind indeed.

This reasoning, apparently sound, is confirmed in the Scriptures; by whose sacred and unerring rules every meditation of this kind ought to be tried. Joseph was sold by his brethren and conveyed to Egypt; but it was God who sent him there, to be the happy instrument of preservation to his friends, and to all the country. The kings of the earth may form schemes and projects; “but their hearts are in the hand of the Lord, and, like the rivers of water, he turns them whithersoever he will.” Herod and Pilate could persecute Jesus Christ; but, in this, “they did only what the hand and counsel of God had determined before to be done.” The hairs of our head may fall to the ground; yet even this is not without the consent of our heavenly Father. “A part of thee,” said the Spirit of God to the Jews, “shall die with the pestilence; and a part shall fall by the sword round about thee;

thee; and I will scatter a third part to all the winds: so shall it be an astonishment and an instruction to the nations that are round about thee." This last passage, for evidence, is equal to a thousand; as it clearly teacheth us, that the calamities of particular men are designed for the instruction of all.

But, not unfrequently, these judgments are abused in another manner; when men of a proud and uncharitable spirit, instead of considering them as warnings to themselves, think and speak of them as direct punishments for the crimes of those who suffer them: an observation which, though it may be true, yet comes not well from a disciple of Jesus Christ, whose religion commands every one "in lowliness of mind to esteem other better than themselves." Indeed, no reasoning can be worse than to say, such a man is a grievous sinner, because he is unhappy here on earth; and another is a great saint, because he is surrounded with all manner of delights. To reason in this manner is to
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set bounds to the Most High, without considering the different views which an infinite Intelligence may have in those strokes which he inflicts on mortals. Sometimes he designs them for trials; as in the case of Abraham, when he received that terrible and afflicting command of sacrificing his only son. Sometimes he designs them to shew forth his power and glory: so the man in the Gospel was born blind, that the works of God might be manifested; and Lazarus died, that the Son of God might be glorified. Sometimes they are designed to shew the faith and fortitude of the sufferer; as in the case of Job. Experience too plainly shews the injustice of such reasoning: for, if we must judge of the vices and virtues of men from their happiness and misery, we must surely prefer Nero wielding the sceptre of the world, to St. Paul dragging his chains in a dungeon.

If any conclusion could be fairly drawn from the sufferings of men on earth, it ought rather to be of God's love than his anger; and in place of saying that the man
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who suffers is more culpable than he who suffers not; we might often have occasion to say, that he who suffers nothing at all is far more criminal than the man who suffers most. Nor is this unjust: the turpitude of sin is often so great, that earthly punishments, perhaps, bear no proportion to it; and, therefore, God is not concerned to punish it in that way. If this life were eternal, such punishment might indeed be necessary; but the certainty of the future life and general judgment entirely removes that necessity.

In general, there are very few sinners to whom any man hath a right to prefer himself. In the life of the greatest sinner, there are only a certain number of crimes that appear to our observation: but who can reckon up the crimes committed by himself? If we should compare ourselves with a criminal who is put to death for theft or robbery, we might seem evidently to have the advantage in that one article; but if we would go carefully over the history of our life; examine narrowly our hearts; examine

amine every vain imagination, and every irregular desire; consider every secret wickedness of which God alone was witness; trying all these, not by the notions of men, but by the laws of God: if we would think of our malice, envy, or slander, which, carried to a certain degree, are more abominable in the sight of God than some vices which are punished by human justice: upon such an examination, we might perhaps find no cause to exult over the wretched criminal. A good man, besides, is always so sensible of his own failings, that this conviction extenuates greatly in his eyes the faults of others: hence he is led, not so much to judge severely of the sufferer—this he has not so much right to do, as to take warning from his sufferings—this the dictates of prudence oblige him to do: a character which strongly recommends itself to the imitation of us all; that at any time when we see the judgments of God abroad in the earth, we should apply our hearts to learn righteousness, lest we ourselves likewise perish. Often have we heard of earthquakes,

quakes, of burnings, of wars, and rumours of wars. The nations on which these judgments fell, no doubt, deserved them: they were punished for their offences; but they were punished also for the instruction of others, who live in security and peace. "Suppose ye," said our Saviour to the Jews, "that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." And can we suppose that the people who have been swallowed up alive, who have been swept away by pestilence, whose bodies have been left by thousands in the fields of war, a prey to the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air; can we presumptuously suppose that they were greater sinners than we are? Surely, no. Punishments of a similar kind may, therefore, justly fall on us; and whether they will fall or not, God alone can tell. We may indeed prevent them, by reforming our manners: this is the work of every one; and when, by the particular reformation of every

every one, a general change for the better shall become conspicuous, it is *then* that the Almighty will dissipate every threatening cloud, and secure our land from every storm. In the mean time, every man, by reforming himself, may obtain true peace of mind, which will lead him at last to that happy region where peace and happiness for ever dwell.

S E R M O N VII.

GEN. i. 31.

GOD SAW EVERY THING THAT HE HAD
MADE, AND BEHOLD IT WAS VERY
GOOD.

WITH these words the inspired historian finisheth his account of the creation. After having described the Supreme Architect as pronouncing his approbation of several particular parts, he represents him as taking a general survey of the whole completed work, and declaring it to be very good; that is, answerable to the intention and purpose for which it was made.

Upon the most superficial view of nature, traces of most exquisite design are observable,

fervable, with an admirable fitness of every thing for its destined end; and men who employ their powers in enquiring into such of Nature's works as are not obvious to common view, are at every step delighted with discoveries of excellence and beauty. Whether we look to the heavens above, or the earth beneath, with all the splendid decoration in which they are clad; whether we consider in general the magnificence of those works of God, or more minutely their curious contrivance; the various systems into which they are ranged, or the harmony of these making one great whole; we cannot but adore, in every case, the wisdom and power of the great Creator. The sun, the moon, and the stars, which God hath ordained to move in spaces inconceivably vast, and with velocities inconceivably swift, continue to this day to shed their light and beneficial influences, to roll on in solemn silence and undisturbed order, regular in their tracts, and true to their seasons as when they first were launched from the hand of the Eter-

nal. Who can look without emotion on that orb which is the fountain of day to our world and system, when he rises to cheer all nature with light and life? "He comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the extremities of it, and there is nothing hid from his heat." Nor can we behold with unconcern the face of our own earth, when flourishing in the blooms of spring and summer. On the contrary, we behold with rapture the lively verdure that covers it, and the gay flowers that with infinite variety of colouring adorn it; the trees of the forest extending their green shades, and those of the garden in their blossoms promising their annual tribute: or when the fields are white in harvest, bringing forth food for man and beast, how natural is it for us to admire and adore the goodness of HIM who gives us fruitful seasons, and cloaths our valleys with corn! It is the same, if we look into the animal world,
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with all its infinite varieties of order, from "Leviathan, hugest of living creatures," to those insects that escape the notice of our eye: we see them all fitted with parts and powers for the elements they are to inhabit, and the purposes they are to serve. And here is a field for contemplation immensely large, to which, in reading the holy Scriptures, our thoughts are often turned. But chiefly in the human race, the power and goodness of God are conspicuous. All this rich and beautiful scene, and all its inhabitants, are given into the hands of man, who is constituted lord of the sublunary world. "Let us make man," said the Creator, "in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth." How wonderful is the structure of our bodies, and how much distinguished from the inferior animals, in majesty of stature, and expression of countenance! What a treasure is there in the powers of the mind; in the understand-

ing; in the imagination and invention; in the various affections and appetites planted in us; in the sense of beauty, propriety, and dignity; and especially in the sense of good and evil, of the morally excellent and the deformed! When we attend to all these, we must perceive that man was most happily adapted to the state in which he was placed; and made capable of enjoying pleasures so numerous and various as to render his existence highly delightful. But still we have considered nature only in its proper, and its healthful state: whereas we all know that it is liable to many disorders which hurt that state, spoil all its gaiety, and mar its beauty. Thus, in the vegetable world, while the trees and the flowers are in their full glory, comes the withering blast of the desert, and lays their blooming honours low. If the showers of heaven are restrained while the earth is exposed to the scorching sun, the herbage of the fields must sicken and die. The rich produce of the harvest may soon be destroyed, torn and scattered by the fury of the tempest, or swept away
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by the raging torrent; and the face of the earth, at one time all life and beauty, may at another time appear as a horrid wilderness. So with respect to the animal kinds; many and heavy disorders attend them. The flocks and the herds have their epidemical diseases; and that life which is void of fear and of care, is yet exposed to weakness and suffering. These distresses of the vegetable and animal creation are finely touched by one of the Prophets: "Be ashamed, O ye husbandmen, for the wheat and for the barley, because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth, even all the trees of the field are withered. How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." As for rational life, we know it is attended with innumerable disorders. Pains of various kinds afflict us, acute in their degrees, and fatal in their tendencies: some of them, perhaps, originally incident to our frame, but many more brought on by our own

intemperance. Yet our woes were slight, if these were all; but other distempers destroy us, of which the brutal orders are not susceptible; distempers of the moral kind, which are far more dismal than any that infest mere animal life, as they ruin our nature in its highest excellencies, and deprive it of its purest enjoyments. Man is so constituted, that while grievous disorders possess the animal frame, the mind may yet be in an excellent state, and have the most satisfying relishes of enjoyment: whereas, if the mind is morally sick, if *it* is depraved and its powers perverted, then the dignity of man, with all enjoyment properly human, is lost; nor can that loss possibly be repaired by any strength of the animal powers, nor by the highest relish of sensual pleasure, with the richest variety of gratifying objects. Prevailing immorality is the very destruction of the soul, turning that which was the glory of the creation into its most hateful deformity. But it is carefully to be noticed, that this calamitous and loathsome state of the mind is of our own
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procuring; it is no part of the work of God: for he “made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” It is from the guilty consent of the soul to the clamorous demands of enflamed passion, that all this evil takes its rise.

The sum of what I have said is, that nature in all her productions, when free from distempers and in a proper state, is excellent and lovely, full of life, and full of pleasure. This is especially the case with mankind, in a right moral state; as it is the reverse in a state of depravity. This points out to us a most important and obvious reflection, touching the absurdity of men who seek for happiness in the ways of vice: for if a state of moral rectitude is that which is suitable to nature, and in which the very perfection of nature consists; then surely this state, and this only, must be truly happy, and every thing opposite to it must tend to wretchedness. No man will say that a state unnatural, and quite opposite to nature's design, can be a pleasing and a happy one: a state in which
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every thing leads to ruin; in which all health and soundness is lost. As well might he say that one can be happy who lies gasping in a burning fever, who is tortured with grinding pains in his bones, or any other grievous malady. Look upon the face of nature around us, when in a state perfectly healthful; how gay, how pleasing it appears! But how much otherwise when distemper preys upon its beauties; when the parched earth becomes like a desert, and the living verdure is withered! Or see how an animal, rejoicing in that life which nature hath given it, joyous and pleased in pursuing its own instincts, how languid and dead it appears when taken out of its proper element! We see then no more gaiety, no more pleasure, no more enjoyment: and so it is universally; whatever is in a state unnatural must be unhappy; losing health and soundness, all true enjoyment is lost.

Nor will any man say that a state of holiness, or moral integrity, is unsuitable to the frame of human nature, and that vice

vice is more agreeable to it; that the former is its distemper, and the latter salutary. All nature loudly exclaims against this doctrine, and demonstrates the contrary. Can that be a natural and healthful state, in which a man is self-condemned, and in which his own conscience necessarily becomes his enemy? Can that be a sound and natural state, in which blind passion prevails against reason, and caprice against the calm dictates of true wisdom? in which the noblest affections are imprisoned, and their tendencies quite obstructed, by those that are the most low and mean? Is that a natural state, in which all openness of heart, and liberality of sentiment, are ruined by a selfish spirit? in which a sense of decency and dignity hath no place? in which the animal passions are most obsequiously served, and the nobler powers utterly neglected? Can that state be sound, in which the extravagancies of intemperance and debauchery are preferred to regularity and propriety of life? falsehood, injustice, oppression, cruelty, and violence, to truth, honour,

honour, integrity, generosity, and compassion? It is absolutely impossible. All these things are the distempers of the soul, utterly inconsistent with its health, and also with its happiness.

I would not be understood to deny that men actually have pleasure in the ways of vice; for surely if they had no pleasure in them, they would never pursue them: but that pleasure, so far as it is inconsistent with purity and goodness of heart, may be fitly compared to the fancied happiness of a person in a delirium, or to the fine scenes which a distempered imagination creates; for they are empty and unsubstantial. Let us attend to the nature of bodily health. When we are free from pain and languor; when the animal faculties are in such a state as to perform with ease their proper functions; when the vital fluid moves in a soft and lively flow, we have then a delightful sensation of complete health. To have this sensation interrupted is afflicting; and its return again to order is highly pleasing. Of the same kind, but of greater poignancy,
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are the sensations of the mind, when the moral state is sound. The more we possess true worth in this world, the more we shall enjoy these happy sensations: and in the world above we shall have them perfectly, and without interruption. To good men this is matter of feeling, not of faith, that there is as great a certainty in the moral or spiritual, as in the animal life; its powers are as real, and its gratifications as sensible: the sense of right and wrong, of excellent and vile, of lovely and hateful—all these are real feelings; and to look upon them as visionary, is to contradict the voice of reason and nature. How absurd then are those prejudices by which men become averse to righteousness, and to that kind of enjoyment which God hath annexed to it! It is as if they believed they should not be happy in a state of most perfect health, and were uneasy unless when visited by sickness. We find, indeed, in Scripture, the divine life sometimes represented as difficult and laborious, as a state of tribulation and suffering; but none of those
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representations contradict what I have advanced upon this argument. They relate principally to two things. First, to a state of persecution for conscience sake, which in many ages hath been the state of the good, and was so particularly of the first disciples of Christ, of which our blessed Lord often forewarned them, and exhorted them to stand prepared against it, by the most deliberate, calm, and firm resolution. But such persecution is not the lot of all men; and, thanks to God, not ours. Perhaps, indeed, those representations relate to the severities of self-denial, which in the beginnings of true religion are certainly painful, especially when exorbitant passions have grown to great strength, by habits of vice, and a continued gratification: or perhaps they relate to some temptations, particularly strong, to which in the present state the integrity of the servants of God may be exposed. But it never was, nor could possibly be, the intention of them to teach that righteousness is not the health of the mind; or that
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in the enjoyment of such health men shall not find themselves so far completely happy: for this is the language of Scripture, of nature, and of experience, in every instance where experience hath been made. We must, therefore, adhere to these two great principles, that in holiness consists the health of the mind, and that in such a state of health men shall find happiness. If not here, where else shall we find it? for what but holiness, or integrity of character, can make our existence at all valuable? Let us consider what worth we acquire by maintaining such a character, and how nobly our powers are all employed. Our understandings make daily improvement and progress in knowledge; our appetites are highly gratified within the limits of moderation; our passions are so regulated as effectually to answer their several ends, while they cause no disorder nor tumult in the soul; the love of God becomes a source of supreme joy; and the love of our brethren yields us pleasures which have no bounds, and fear no satiety. Existence
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to man in such a state must be an invaluable blessing : and well might the adorable Creator say of this, as of all his other works, that “ it was very good ;” and well may his creatures rejoice in their portions of happiness, and thank him continually for the endless emanations of his bounty.

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S E R M O N VIII.

LUKE, xi. 23.

HE THAT IS NOT WITH ME, IS AGAINST
ME.

IT is a prerogative of the Almighty's grandeur, to be served by men who glory in his service. Nothing can evade our obligation to this duty, for it is the basis and principle of every virtue: "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all to the glory of God." The interests of God, that is, whatever concerns his worship, his law, or his honour, are of so exalted a nature, that no other interest can, without extravagance, be compared to them: and these interests are so much in our hands here on earth, that when they suffer any violence, God may justly call us to ac-

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count for it, as the effect of our supineness and infidelity. This is what happens every day, when by false policy we neglect to maintain them: when we find pretences to be silent when we ought to speak; to dissemble when we ought to declare ourselves; to connive and tolerate when we ought to reproach and punish. For what can secure us from the judgment of that God whose cause we betray? and what support can worldly wisdom afford, whose sinful maxims render us answerable for the injury which Heaven receives?—It is by such reasoning that the rigorous precept is explained, which commands us to resist even unto blood; to persist in the profession of our Christian faith, though it should bring on us the last of misfortunes, the cruelest of tortures, and the deprivation of life; for our religion, immutable like the God whom it teacheth us to adore, knows nothing of shrinking, or base compliance. In fact, it was this necessity, either of dying for the faith, or of being prevaricators and apostates, that made so many martyrs to the cause of
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Christianity. This necessity we are not now exposed to; and therefore it is needless to fortify our minds against terrors that exist no more. But the same reason which obliged those martyrs to profess their faith, obligeth us at this very day to shew our zeal upon every occasion where the interests of virtue are exposed; because the particular obligation which every Christian hath of professing his faith, is no more than a consequence of the general obligation of being zealous for his God.

It is then in virtue of this prerogative that Jesus Christ, when proposing the fundamental maxims of his reign, of that supreme empire which he claims as God, insists particularly upon this—that he who is not with him, must be against him. A sentence which will for ever confound the wise ones of the world, and reprobate that criminal indifference which they put on when the interests of Heaven are in question: a sentence which will invincibly refute their frivolous reasons for justifying their silence, and excusing their cowardice

in the cause of God: a sentence of malediction for those easy spirits who have found the secret of pleasing God without displeasing the world. How shall they answer to their great Lord, when he tells them that this is impossible? Will they pretend to have understood his precepts better than himself? or to have had more prudence and discretion in their zeal than he hath prescribed? The prophet David reasoned very differently, and the idea which he conceived of the Supreme Being inspired him with very opposite sentiments. "The zeal of thine house hath consumed me, and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." Those reproaches, said he to God in the fulness of his heart, by the impiety and insolence of men, are cast even against thy throne; but by the spirit of charity, which animates me, I feel them fall upon my head. The blasphemies which are vented on thy name, the profanations of thy sanctuary, the transgressions of thy law, the insults, the scandals, and the madness of thy people, all

all these make irresistable impressions on my heart.

Such is the example which the Scripture sets before our eyes; for it is not only a king like David who ought to speak so; but a lord in his territories, a judge on his bench, a magistrate in his robes, a master in his family; every one, without exception, in their particular state. All the wanderings of a libertine son must touch the heart of his father, all the disorders of a vicious domestic must touch the heart of his master; else they do not fulfil the character of God's servants; else they abuse the power which the Almighty hath put in their hands.

It would be absurd, and absolutely insupportable, to maintain, that God should think *that* a reasonable service which the world regards as a species of perfidy; that he should reckon for a mark of our attachment the same conduct which men would hold for a mark of contempt. A man, far from holding as a friend him who upon occasion could hesitate to take his

part, would despise him as an inconstant waverer, unworthy and incapable of friendly offices. A prince, far from reckoning in the number of his faithful subjects him who, in some disastrous conjuncture, could affect to stand neuter, would treat him as a rebel, and an enemy of the state. Let us see then whether the policy of the world, which, with all its turnings and windings, cannot excuse that disposition of indifference with regard to man, can authorize it with regard to God; or if God, jealous for his glory and the fidelity that is due to him, will be satisfied with that which is not sufficient for men.

We may add to this, that, in the opinion of mankind, indifference for the cause of God is generally taken and interpreted as a secret desertion of his interests; for, libertinism, even the most obstinate, not daring to lift its mask, and for its own safety, whatever malice it may harbour within, being careful not to shew it without, scarcely can we distinguish in the world a man indifferent for God, from

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one who is formally and expressly against God. This remark is so obvious, that for the most part we form the same judgment of them both, and this judgment is neither rash nor superficial; for it is founded on the most common practice of the libertine. An Atheist, if there is one, can make himself known no other way but by his indifference for every thing that regards religion: a man, abandoned to the desires of his corrupted heart, can make himself remarkable no other way but by a certain insensibility to the most shameful actions. Then, for no other reason but to prevent giving scandal to the weak-hearted, we ought so to act, that our characters, being strongly marked, may be easily known; that being the friends of God as we are, or as we would be thought to be, our conduct may leave no place for doubt in this matter. It was this indifference which drew from the prophet Elijah that reproach which we read in the Scriptures, and which we may apply to ourselves: it was this that raised the just anger of the holy man, when he

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saw the rulers of the people remain cold and actionless at the view of open idolatry and sacrilege.—“How long will ye halt between two opinions?” If the Lord of Hosts be your God, why is his sanctuary forsaken, and his worshippers disgraced? If Baal is only a creature of the imagination, why stands his temple adorned with such splendor? why smokes his altar with continual victims? Why remain ye hovering in shameful doubt, as wicked, and almost more wicked, than infidelity itself? How is it that the world, judging of your religion by the interest which you take in it, may with reason suspect you to have very little, or none at all?—Many characters of this sort we may see among ourselves: many to whom every thing is good; who shew equal complaisance to vice and to virtue; who accommodate themselves to error as to truth; who suffer scandal without emotion, and blasphemy without horror; to whom, in a word, the address of the Spirit in the Apocalypse is very applicable:—“I would thou wert either cold or hot; but because thou

thou art only lukewarm, I will cast thee out." These characters are still the more dangerous, because in this state of lukewarmness they have a very great power of stopping the cause of virtue, and advancing that of vice: their indifferency gives them a certain air of candour and moderation; whereas if their malice were more open, men would soon perceive their designs, and repose no belief in their word.

Whatever may be in this, to act so, is to give to the enemies of God all the advantage they wish for: it is to put them in possession of that fatal reign and ruinous empire which by every method they strive to usurp. Libertinism demands not precisely to be applauded, supported, and cherished; it is contented with a bare toleration; and not to disturb or overthrow it, is sufficient to make it flourish. When, therefore, we leave it in peace, we grant all that it aspires after; with this alone it will not fail to take root, and spread its branches on every side. Is it not by this means, and in this way, that it hath al-
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ways attained its ends? The indifference of those who ought to have stifled it in its birth hath ever been the chief cause of its progress: for, to tolerate vice is to authorize and support it.

It may be said, that the lively and ardent zeal, which is opposed to this coldness, when put in action against vice, would be so far from curing, that it would only serve to irritate and spread it. But even though this were the case, our indifference for God would be no less criminal; and in a thousand instances our zeal would no less oblige us to declare ourselves. Let the disease be enraged and encreased; we have done our duty. God had his designs in allowing it to be so; but he never designed that it should be allowed and encouraged by us. Without determining of the thing by its effects, we have always the consolation to think that we have obeyed the commands of God, and taken the part of his laws. It belongs not to us, under pretence of a future and uncertain effect, to dispense with a present and known obligation. It is our duty to
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trust in God, and to hope that he will bless our zeal: for this being a zeal of charity which hath nothing bitter; which is neither proud nor headstrong; which loves the infidel and the sinner, while it combats infidelity and sin; it hath every reason to believe in its own efficacy, and to look for the expected fruits of its reproofs.

It may be said, moreover, that this zeal will sometimes make disturbance and noise. But may not these be reasonably made in the removal of a real disorder, whether it be in our families, or else-where? Is it prudence to shun disturbance when it is become necessary, and may be advantageous? or must an enemy be suffered to lurk in the house for fear of a noise in driving him out? But this will trouble our peace: and let it be troubled. It is then that it may be glorious to God, and worthy of the Christian spirit: for there is a false peace which ought to be troubled; and it is that of which I speak, because it favours vice. Why did the Son of God tell us in his Gospel, that he was not come to send peace

peace on earth, but a sword? that he was come to separate the son from his father, and the mother from her daughter? What did he mean by this, if not to shew us, that, in the course of human life, occasions will happen, in which it is impossible to fulfil the duties which we owe to God, without exposing ourselves to discord with men? And what is there more common than such occasions, where for the honour of virtue we must take up arms against the world? No! there is no peace, foreign or domestic, which we may prefer to the interests of virtue. If the scandal which is committed against these comes from those with whom we are united by the strictest ties, all peace with them is another scandal still greater; and we ought, according to the language of the Gospel, to hate and renounce them; for which they have no room to complain, because in such a case we ought to hate and renounce even ourselves. It was for this that our blessed Lord made use of the tender alliances of father and son, mother and daughter; to
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make us the better understand, that no reason is to be heard that makes for the prejudice of virtue, and the glory of God. And shall we not then spare our neighbour, especially if he is our friend, or a man of distinction? But what is this friend, or man of distinction, that he should be spared, if sparing it can be called? Is he to be compared with the glory of our God? If the Apostles had used such respect, where would we have been? Would they have preached the Gospel in spite of the edicts of emperors, and the menaces of tyrants? Would they have answered with so much firmness to the magistrates who forbade them to speak, "Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye?" If the fathers of the church, the Athanasii, the Chrysostoms, the Augustins, had used such arts, how would the Christian faith have been preserved pure? so many errors destroyed, and so many heresies overthrown? Let us, therefore, act with discretion, but with firmness. Let us respect friendship,
 love,

110 MISCELLANEOUS

love, consanguinity, dignities, and abilities; but let us always condemn injustice and iniquity. Let vice, wherever it is met, be treated with contempt: let no ambiguous word drop from our mouths, no doubtful expression appear in our countenances; but every word and feature declare the hatred and disdain we bear to that enemy of God and of man. It is thus that we may declare ourselves for God; and thus that we may deserve at last to be declared by him, in the face of the universe, the servants of his love, and the friends of his glory.

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SERMON IX.

JAMES. ii. 26.

AS THE BODY WITHOUT THE SPIRIT IS
DEAD, SO FAITH WITHOUT WORKS
IS DEAD ALSO.

RELIGION may be described in general terms, as consisting of knowledge and practice; the first of which is no farther useful than as it tends to produce and encourage the second. The Almighty has not revealed to us the knowledge of himself and his will, merely for the improvement of our understanding, but for the amendment of our lives; not to entertain our minds with abstract speculations, but to govern our actions, and form our souls to virtue. "What doth it profit, my brethren," says the Apostle St. James, "though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"

him? I may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; but shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." This defiance admits of no reply; and clearly overthrows that imaginary faith, which some have supposed sufficient for justification, independent of good works. Nothing being more agreeable to common sense and reason, than to acknowledge the strict connection between faith and works; which is so very strict, that, as no Christian can perform acceptable works without faith, so neither can his faith be acceptable, nor even can it exist in perfection and purity, without good works. Faith, indeed, is not, like the moral virtues, destroyed by a simple omission of its proper acts; yet, by continued negligence, it will imperceptibly die away, and give place to infidelity; not perhaps to open and declared infidelity, but to a secret kind, which seems to be the most prevailing sin of this age. The progress of this decay is easily traced, through all its steps and degrees. By in-

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terminating the practice of those religious duties which faith binds us to, we lose all taste and affection for them: soon after, they become the objects of weariness and disgust, feelings which excite us powerfully to throw them off entirely, by secretly renouncing that faith which imposeth so heavy a load. The substance of faith being corrupted, there remains no more than an empty shadow, worse in the sight of God than Pagan infidelity; because it is infidelity raised upon the wrecks and ruins of divine faith. Thus a man of the world, who spends his life in frivolous occupations, or in supine idleness, soon becomes insensible, and utterly forgetful of the things of God: he knows nothing of penitence; there are no times of mortification for him; he thinks of no sacrament; he even prays no more. He calls himself a Christian, indeed; and perhaps he goes to church out of ceremony, or at times out of curiosity: but where are his deeds of Christianity? his charity? his love for the brethren, and especially those of his own

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household?

household? his care for the education of his children, and the instruction of his domestics? These are all forgotten; and that so long, till the faith which commands them is itself also forgotten. It must be confessed that a habit of faith may exist in the soul without acting; but still no wise man will depend on such a faith for his justification. A thousand enemies wage eternal war against it; and when it lays aside good works, which are its only weapons of defence, it must of necessity be vanquished. How should a man preserve his faith, who does nothing that is proper to support it, but every thing that tends to ruin it? Holding it enslaved to iniquity; piercing it with daily wounds; and to those wounds applying no remedy? The faith which can subsist against such attacks must be a miraculous faith indeed. Besides, if we consider faith in another view, as a supernatural grace bestowed by God, its connection with good works will still appear more evident. For, faith, being given us only for action, all its virtue is reduced to this, that
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it is proper for raising in the soul a desire for those good things which it reveals: its only employment being to support man in the execution of his Christian duties; when it produceth nothing of this kind, the Almighty is concerned even for his own glory to withdraw it. We have not our faith as a simple prerogative, to distinguish us from the infidel nations; nor as a mere ornament to enrich and beautify our souls: we are not taught the wonders which the Son of God has done for us with no other design but that we may know them and rejoice in them; but that we may make proper returns, by works worthy of him and of ourselves. When God therefore views this faith which he hath bestowed upon us; when he looks down on this tree which he hath planted, and instead of fruit finds it only covered with leaves; finds it barren, wild, and uncultivated, though nourished with the fat of the earth and the dews of heaven; he has surely reason to command its extermination—"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" It is thus that

we may sometimes see the most sublime geniuses, the most penetrating and soaring spirits, fall into the grossest errors, and wander in utter darkness, acknowledging neither God, nor faith, nor law. It is thus that the most enlightened among ourselves often have less faith than those simple souls who are humbly occupied in Christian works: we may think this distinction a mark of their weakness and of our elevation; but in this we “err, not knowing the power of God:” for he, as a recompence of their fervour, can communicate his spirit more intimately to them; and, as a punishment of our supineness, can withdraw it entirely from us. Thus the neglect of good works, we see, brings on the extinction of faith; and so far, therefore, they appear absolutely necessary. But we may farther observe, that good works, sincerely and fervently practised, are the only means to arrive at the perfection of faith, or to strengthen a faith that is weak and languishing: and this second truth is capable of illustration, both from reason
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and authority. I give a remarkable example of it, in the person of the centurion Cornelius, of whom mention is made in the book of Acts; who, from an obscure and confused belief which he had of the mysteries of God, arrived at the clear, distinct, and perfect faith of a Christian. God, says the sacred historian, had regard to the works of piety and mercy which Cornelius continually performed; and sent an Apostle to instruct him, and prepare him for baptism. This pattern the Scripture sets before our eyes to excite our holy emulation. Cornelius was a Gentile; but he was “a devout man, who feared God with all his house, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” ‘It is for this,’ said the Angel of the Lord, ‘that I am sent, to tell thee that “thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial:” that these are well-pleasing to the infinite Father of justice and mercy; and that, to reward thy piety, he hath appointed one of his chief Apostles to instruct thee in the wonders of the law of grace.’ This history

is very striking; and teacheth us to adore, not only the depth of God's counsels, but also the sweetness and beauty of his providence. If Cornelius had not been devout, if he had not been charitable, he must have remained buried with thousands more in the gloom of Paganism. For why did the Almighty visit this man in the midst of a Gentile nation, but that he found not so great faith and charity, no not in Israel? That zeal in a Pagan to sanctify his family by his good example; that perseverance in prayer; that inviolable probity which procured him the good report of the whole nation of the Jews; but especially that tender disposition which continually moved him to assist the indigent; it was these procured him the extraordinary graces of heaven.—Let us, like him, be pious, zealous, honest, and charitable; and we shall see whether that God, who is ever faithful in his promises, will not by his Holy Spirit encrease and strengthen our faith. Yes! rather than we should remain comfortless, the Almighty will send an Angel to support us;

us; rather than we should remain in darkness, he will raise up another St. Peter to instruct us in celestial wisdom: for “ of a truth God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.” Indeed, though the Scripture afforded us no example of this kind, the very nature of things might convince us that thus it must be. It is true, that God could, by a miracle of his power, and without the concurrence of good works, establish a perfect faith in the soul of man, could command light to shine from the very center of darkness: but such a miracle cannot in reason be expected; and will never be expected but by the highest presumption, and the grossest ignorance. We have in our own hands the sure and infallible means for obtaining this grace; which is to put what portion of it we have in action. We cannot, perhaps, at present serve God, nor fulfil his law, with that vivacity and assurance of faith which all his saints have shewn; but we can interest the Almighty

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in our favour. By regulating our family; by doing justice to all the world; by inspiring the love of virtue among our friends; by employing other and more powerful intercessors, which are the poor and the needy; we may incline God to restore us that spirit of religion which is well nigh lost. Every charitable action we perform; every assistance we bring to the ruined or afflicted; every prayer we breathe to Heaven, will serve to rekindle our wavering faith.

We have always sufficient faith to enable us to begin this work; and sufficient to condemn us, indeed, if we begin it not. Let us, therefore, acknowledge the gift of God, and bless Heaven for this benefit, though as yet perhaps we have not profited by it. Though we had only the belief of a God, and of his adorable attributes, which, though invisible themselves, are yet shewn forth in the creatures—this alone were enough to oblige us to our duty. What was it inspired the centurion Cornelius, of whom I have spoken, with so much fervor in his prayers and his charities? It was
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not the faith of Jesus Christ; for him he had not known: nor was it the faith of Moses and the Patriarchs; for their authority he did not acknowledge: it was only the faith of a Supreme Being presiding over the universe. He believed in a God, the rewarder of virtue, and avenger of vice; and this made him conclude, that, being rich, he was obliged to be charitable; that, being a father, he was obliged to teach his children the duties of religion; that, being a master, he was obliged to give good example to his domestics; that, being a man and a sinner, he was obliged to pray, and to perform works of penitence. Do we not, like him, believe in a God? and, in the profoundest abysses of libertinism, do we not still preserve that ray of light which nature herself affords to point out the existence of a Deity? We have then sufficient faith for a beginning; and sufficient to engage us in the duties of piety and charity, in the accomplishment of which our faith shall be infallibly perfected.

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It behoves us, therefore, by our utmost efforts in deeds agreeable to our holy profession, to encourage whatever principles remain in our hearts. With the assistance of that grace which will never be denied us, there needs no more to make these roots acquire their former strength; they will strike deep, spread abroad, and flourish with new fruits. Let us not wait till the measure of our iniquities be filled up, and the sun of mercy for ever set. We are exhorted by the prophet to "seek the Lord while he may be found:" and it is doubtless our greatest happiness, that, while the world is in pursuit of vanity, we should be commanded to seek *this great first cause and last end*, this Author and Father of eternal truth. But he dwells for ever in light inaccessible; and it is only by virtuous works that we can approach his sacred throne: for who should conduct us to the God of virtue, but virtue herself? Is it then by a life altogether negligent and worldly that we can seek God? Is it in the walks of vanity that we shall find him?

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Is it by courses of dissipation and insensibility that we shall attain to the knowledge of the Most High? No! this cannot be. In the infancy of the church, the faith of Christians was supported by miracles; and some time after, it was strengthened by persecutions: but now that miracles have ceased, and persecutions are no more, it is only by the constancy of good works that our faith can be maintained. Without these, it cannot remain: it is dead as the body without the soul.—Let us then address our prayers to God, to beg his assistance in our works of faith; and, aided by him, let us go on with increasing ardour and activity. Moved by our filial-confidence, he will hearken to our prayers; our weak and cold faith shall revive within us, and we shall revive with it. By superior diligence our former losses shall be repaired; and our light grow clearer in proportion to our good works. In the end we shall be found worthy of this sentence from our Judge—
“As thou hast believed, so be it unto thee.”
Thou hast improved the talent which was
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intrusted to thy care; thou hast "shewn thy faith by thy works:" come and receive thy reward. Thou hast trod with firm perseverance the path which thy faith traced out, and still had an eye to the recompence which it discovered to thee: come, take possession of the heavenly kingdom, and enjoy eternal felicity.

S E R.

S E R M O N X.

2 S A M. i. 24.

YE DAUGHTERS OF ISRAEL, WEEP
OVER SAUL.

THESE words are taken from the funeral eulogium of the first of the Jewish monarchs, spoken by his antagonist and successor. They bear equal testimony to the candour of the living, and the merit of the dead: and the address they contain is not more pathetic than just; for of all the Israelitish kings, perhaps not one deserved more truly to be lamented by the daughters of his people than this unhappy prince. Whatever stains deform the picture which the sacred historians have given us of him, whatever defects appear in his character, yet of neglecting the temporal interest of his

his kingdom, he cannot with justice be accused. To dispense the blessings and encourage the arts of peace, he had little opportunity, as the country he was appointed to govern, from its situation, could not be long, in the course of human things, exempt from war: but when exertions of bravery were required, in the perilous hour of foreign invasion, in the fatigues of the tedious march, and the dreadful strife of battle, Saul was the first to bear the toil and brave the danger. There prevailed, however, in all his actions, a most remarkable unsteadiness of conduct, an irresoluteness and inconsistency which we can no otherwise account for than by supposing that he was not always in his perfect mind. Of this indeed we have some notice given in the relation of his being visited with a spirit of melancholy, which, though charmed away for a season by the music of David's harp, we may suppose returned afterwards with increasing rage.

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He was raised to the throne expressly for his personal merit: " See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people." It is not necessary for a great man to be the son of a great man. Virtues and genius go not by transfusion; they are the gifts of bounteous nature, and bestowed without regard to the distinctions of rank invented by man. Thus from the obscure cottage rises the philosopher, whose capacious mind can grasp the universe: thus from the nameless hamlet rises the poet, whose fame shall last coeval with the earth: and thus, from following his asses, Saul rose to be the leader of God's people.

In the discharge of that important commission, he shewed some noble virtues, which ought to adorn every prince and every man. His justice was very strict. We find him about to put his own son to death, for breaking an order, at the promulgation of which he was not present. Mercy, however, he also possessed. In one instance, at least, we know he disobeyed an express
command

command of Heaven, and ruined his affairs for ever, to save a king whom he had vanquished in war; and this was certainly mercy, though widely misplaced. His temperance too was remarkable: he could support for a whole day the toils of battle, and lead on his warriors to reiterated conflicts, without tasting food. He had also but one wife; a circumstance in which I believe he was imitated by few of note among his countrymen. Yet these virtues were strangely sullied and contrasted by that inconsistency I mentioned. How shall we reconcile to that humane spirit which moved him to spare Agag, his cruel destruction of the city of Nob, where he butchered "men and women, children and sucklings?" A zealous panegyrist might perhaps extenuate this outrage, by comparing it with some more horrid deeds, perpetrated by other worthies of his nation: but no person of feeling, no person who is not dead to the love of mankind, can speak or think of it otherwise than with horror. How also can we reconcile to the
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idea of justice his deceitful and capricious treatment of David? There were, it is true, circumstances to excite jealousy. He saw him the favourite of his son; he knew him for the favoured lover of his daughter; and he heard the common people praise him to the height of extravagance: but these cannot excuse the low cunning he practised, and the implacable resentment he expressed against him. We must observe, that in the latter part of his reign he seems to have been afflicted with a total failure of his mental powers. He had, like a wise prince, banished from the land those miscreants who pretended to sorcery and divination, who by tricks imposed on the credulous an opinion that they possessed more than mortal power: yet behold him repairing, himself, to one of those wretches for counsel in the affairs of his government. How weak! how inconsistent! How do we despise the king of Israel, stealing away from his encamped host, and wandering in disguise through the gloom of night, to enquire his fate of

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a miserable juggler! Who could imagine that this man, at night so faint and spiritless, should rise the next morning intrepid for the fight; and, though hopeless of victory, lead on his troops with the firm serenity of a conqueror? His soul seems, in this concluding scene, to have recalled its scattered powers, and, like the last flame of a dying lamp, burst forth in one bright momentary blaze, before extinction. The death of Saul on Mount Gilboa was equal to any thing that we admire in the heroes of Greece and Rome. Let us think we see the unfortunate monarch long striving with fruitless valour to stem the tide of battle;—his people fall around him; a general rout ensues; the chariots of the enemy come thundering on; and their fiery steeds trampling the corpses of the slain;—wild havoc rages over the fatal mountain. Saul leans breathless on his spear, spent and weary, scorning equally to fly and to yield. His three sons lie dead by his side—dead in the cause of their country. What were then the feelings of
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the king? what were then the feelings of the father?—Let us draw a veil over the distressful scene.—“How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

Thus fell king Saul—a man raised from an humble, and probably a happy state, to all the splendors and the troubles of royalty, to waste many days of toil, and nights of anxiety—and then to die, with the flower of his family, in a disastrous battle:—was he worthy of a fate so hard? Such events, indeed, are common in the history of every nation. Many a noble patriot, and many an excellent prince, with virtues more deserving, have had deaths less glorious: yet still, in the case of Saul, there was something particular. Some reason of more than common weight there must have been, to cause the man designed for the founder of the Jewish monarchy to be peremptorily rejected by the same power and authority from which he received his crown: nor is this reason difficult to be found. The

character of Saul had one capital blemish, which I have not yet noticed—an overweening confidence in his own abilities, and a disregard to the religion of his country. To this spring may be traced those actions of his which are most severely blamed: his intrusion into the priest's office; his sparing the king of Amalek; his extermination of the priests at Nob; his persecution of the Gibeonites; and his disrespect to the prophet Samuel. In fact, he seems to have paid no attention to the rites of national worship, but when he thought they might serve some political purpose; regarding religion, perhaps, as little more than an engine of state. By such conduct he plainly unfitted himself for the government to which he was appointed. In any nation, a king without religion is a most dangerous character; but in a nation which, till then, had been governed immediately by God himself, a king without religion was a very monster. The first and chief of the regal duties there must have been a strict attention to all the prescribed

prescribed rites of divine worship, and a most minute regard to those oraculous communications which the Almighty then deigned to give his favourite people. Accordingly, we may observe the sacred historians give us for the leading feature in the character of every prince—"he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord:" or, "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." The latter was applied to Saul—"Now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

From this light sketch of the character of king Saul we may draw the following important observation—that to neglect the duties of religion, even supposing we fully discharge those of morality, is a very great crime. We see what disasters that neglect brought upon this ill-fated monarch, which by a more judicious conduct he might have avoided, and fixed the sceptre

of Israel securely in the hands of his family. I will not affirm that he never failed in the exercise of the moral and social virtues, though in that respect it is evident he excelled some of his more illustrious successors; yet, granting he had in this been blameless, we have reason to think his contempt for the national religion would still have drawn the same fatal catastrophe on his reign; and if this crime was so heinous, and its consequences so ruinous to a man placed in the foremost rank of earthly honours, what must it be to those who move in humbler sphere, unmolested by his temptations, unseduced by the specious excuses which his self-confidence, no doubt, could plead? What must be the guilt of those characters, too common in the world, who look on themselves as perfect in virtue while they are honest men and good citizens, although they forget their God days without number, and despise every established mode of paying him reverence? Have they the distractions
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of royalty to plead? the intoxication of unlimited power? or the jealousy of authority?—No! none of these; nor any thing but a miserable blindness, and most obdurate insensibility. This artificial separation of religion and morality is really a matter of violence. They are kindred beings, and, like righteousness and peace, ought to kiss each other. If religion had any tendency to lessen social happiness; if it blunted the delicious feelings of humanity; if it discouraged the generous sympathies of friendship; if it cut those dearer bands that connect us all together; we might be less surprized at this fine distinction between the religious and the moral man: but as nothing of that kind takes place, is there not some absurdity in practising the duties of morality, yet neglecting the God by whose appointment they are made necessary to the happiness of civil life? I can imagine cases, in which the absurdity will appear very palpable: I can imagine myself a man of this moral

stamp; humane, just, and generous, but utterly negligent of religion; spending the hours, which my friends employ in praising their God and praying for his blessings, in walking about and gazing on the sun. I meet a man in extreme distress, attended with every circumstance that can move the tender soul to pity: he tells me his mournful tale; his complaints tear my heart with anguish, Perhaps I have it in my power to remove all his woe, by affording him assistance; which I therefore instantly do, and enjoy for a moment the finest emotion of which human nature is susceptible. But see the object of my bounty, with eyes and arms raised towards Heaven, with every impassioned gesture and expression that gratitude can dictate, praying for rewards on his benefactor's head; calling on the great God of the universe to bless me. What a shock!—My enjoyment is gone. I turn away muttering and in pain, “When did I make such a request for myself? when did I think of
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the great God of the universe? or, whether in the universe there were a God at all?"

It is only the man who to the deeds of morality adds the duties of religion, who could enjoy this exertion of benevolence, and every other delight which our Creator has annexed to the practice of virtue, without alloy. The fervent prayer of gratitude, far from troubling, will increase his happiness; for in it he can with confidence join. Every blessing of life is sweetened to him, by the reflection that he has not been ungrateful for them; and if distress overtake him, it will not be embittered by the consciousness of having deserved it for failing in his duty to Heaven. Even in that last and awful hour, when Nature, trembling on the verge of life, looks often back with regret, and forward with anxiety;—in that hour, when the marble heart of ingratitude shall be convulsed with horror, he will not, like Saul, wish for some friendly sword to end at once his miserable

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able being;—but in that, as in all other dispensations, will adore, with submission and thankfulness, the Author and Giver of every good thing !

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S E R M O N XI.

P R O V. xxii. 2.

THE RICH AND POOR MEET TOGETHER: THE LORD IS THE MAKER OF THEM ALL.

NO dispensation of Providence appears, at first sight, more advantageous to mankind than the diversity of conditions. To live together in social bodies, and afford mutual assistance to each other, would have been utterly impossible for men, had they been all placed on the same rank, and endowed with equal portions of opulence and power. It is the variety of condition alone which renders men necessary to one another. The prince has need of his people, and the people have need of their prince:

prince: the politician has need of the soldiers, and the soldiers have need of the politician. This consciousness of the need which we have of our fellow-creatures is the strong tie which binds us to them, and which inclines us to give them our help, with a view of receiving help from them in our turn.

Yet, by the depravity of the human race, this useful order has been miserably abused. On one side, the great have been dazzled by their own splendor, and hence have become haughty, disdainful, and oppressive. On the other, the low, forgetting the dignity which naturally cleaves to a reasonable soul, and suffering every feeling to grow base and sordid as their state, have become fawning and mean; have bowed down to imaginary divinities, and crouched before phantoms of grandeur.

Both parties have acquired their erroneous ideas from neglecting to consider themselves in a proper point of view; for, had they done so, they must have perceived,

ceived, that the greatest distinction which it hath pleased the Almighty to put among men, hinders them not from being essentially equal: that there is nothing in the condition of the greatest man, which can authorize over-weening pride; nor in that of the lowest, which can debase the image of God; but that the rich and the poor “meet together,” have an essential equality in their nature, in their privileges, in their destination, and in their end.

The nature of man consists of a spirit united to a body: and this description applies to the whole race, to the rich and the poor, to the great and the small. The soul of the poor man, as well as that of the rich, has the power of considering principles, of drawing consequences, of discerning truth from falsehood, of chusing good or evil, of seeking for the most glorious and useful attainments. His body too bears the same characters of skill and exquisite contrivance: it is harmonious in its parts, just in its motions, and proportioned in its powers. The laws that
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unite the body of the poor man to his soul, are the same as in the rich: the same correspondence subsists between the parts; the same intimate connection or composition of being. This is man; and these are the faculties of man, which no diversity of rank can essentially change.

As their powers are the same, so too are their weaknesses. The body of the rich man, like that of the poor, is subject to accident, to pain, to disease, and to dissolution. The soul of the rich, like that of the poor, is subject to the influence of the passions; is the prey of suspicion and uncertainty; is narrowly bounded by its natural ignorance; is liable to be disturbed in its most interesting meditations by a very trifle, by a ray of light, by an unexpected sound, by the motion of an atom.

Nor do their privileges differ more: for though a poor man cannot exercise the authority of the great, nor obtain the reputation of immortal heroes, yet he may aspire to honours infinitely greater. Let

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us discover, if possible, the most miserable of men; pierce through the clouds of scorn, of neglect, of indigence, and oblivion, that surround him; and draw him from that state, in which he seems hardly to enjoy existence. This man, unknown to all the world, is yet possessed of the most noble and glorious privileges. He has a right of raising himself to God by the ardour of his prayers; and he can assure himself, without danger of delusion, that the great God, in the midst of all his glory, and among the eternal praises that surround his throne, will regard and answer to his prayers. He can say to himself, "The attention which the Supreme Being hath to the government of the universe, to the necessities of men and of angels, will not hinder him to think of me, to be concerned for my salvation, my subsistence, my health—the very hairs of my head. For me, as well as for the greatest of mortals, were all his gracious dispensations formed: for me, before the foundation of this world, his eternal Son was destined

destined to be the victim of propitiation: for me hath his spirit "shaken the heavens, and the earth, and the sea;" established a religion against which no power shall prevail; and, in the practice of this religion, given me assurance of an eternal weight of glory."

Such are the incontestible privileges of this man, however poor and despised he may be. What is there more glorious belonging to the greatest man on earth? The crowds of attendants that move at his nod; his chariots of triumph that whirl him along; his garments of silk and gold; his titles of respect and of flattery; do these give him any real superiority over a being whose privileges I have but very imperfectly enumerated?

Nothing shews so much the meanness of the great, as the value which they set on exterior advantages; for thus they renounce their true and proper grandeur, to hold by that which is foreign: they are proud of honours merely extraneous and accessory, while they forego such as are
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natural and indelible. The glory of man consists not in that he is rich, noble, a lord, or a king; but in that he is a man: a being formed after the image of God, and capable of the sublimest attainments.

What are the views of God with regard to men? What end does he propose in placing us on this planet, thirty, forty, or fourscore years, before our eternal doom be fixed? He intends it as our time of trial: he sets before our eyes supreme happiness, and supreme misery: he shews us the vices that conduct to the one, and the virtues necessary to obtain the other; and, leaving to ourselves what conduct to choose, declares that this shall decide our fate. On this principle, what is the most glorious condition? It is not that which raiseth us in society; nor that which procures us the greatest honours and accommodations of life: for it is more glorious to be a good subject than a wicked king; to be a good disciple than a profligate teacher. But we have, for the most part, false ideas of glory, formed entirely upon the opinions of men,

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who are not always just estimators of things. Whatever can raise us in their eyes appears glorious; and whatever will humble us seems despicable. To some professions in life we affix inseparably an idea of meanness, which we commonly transfer to the persons exercising them, and thus accustom ourselves to despise men who are honoured by God. Let us undeceive ourselves—There is no profession shameful if it is not vicious.

There is indeed something more noble in the objects of some professions than of others. There is something much greater in the design of a magistrate making and executing laws for the good of mankind, than in that of a mechanic practising the simplest arts. There is something much greater in the design of a pastor explaining the grand precepts of religion, than in that of a man who is confined to teach the first rudiments of learning. But God will not determine our everlasting state according to the design of our professions, but according to the execution: in that respect all professions

professions are equal, and all men have the same destination. The rich and the poor have been set in different ranks; but all with the same design—to fulfil the gracious purposes of God towards man.

Mankind then are essentially equal in their nature, their privileges, and their destination. Above all this, equality is eminently conspicuous in their end. Here there is no need of arguments. It is sufficient to mention the facts, as they are daily seen. “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,” is the inexorable and universal decree. The thoughtless rich man, who fares sumptuously every day; who rejoiceth in his fertile fields, and bids his soul be merry; who enlargeth his barns, and lays up store for many years:—the houseless wretch, who drags on a languishing life; who eats his scanty morsel from door to door, while his naked limbs shiver in the winter’s storm:—the noble, who stalks in borrowed plumes; who counts for virtues the number of his ancestors, and thinks himself formed of

richer clay than other mortals:—and the plebian, who ridicules this folly, and is himself as ridiculous in another way:—These all tread in different paths, conducting infallibly to the same end. They go the way in which all the world has gone—to death. Where is Alexander? where is Cæsar? where are the men whose very names made the world tremble? They *have been*: but they are no more. They have fallen at that omnipotent voice which calls the children of men to return. From this the sceptre is no more security than the shepherd's crook.

Go to the house of the rich man dying; traverse his sumptuous apartments; pass through his train of slaves, and his weeping friends: draw back his gaudy curtains; and what shall we see but the most dismal object? a livid, pale, haggard visage. What shall we hear but the cries of a wretch agonizing in bodily pain, sharpened perhaps by mental terror? And where is the cottage; where is the dreary abode of poverty, which can afford a more miserable

miserable spectacle?—There is none! The ravages of death are the same to the rich and the poor: their eyes are equally condemned to impenetrable darkness, their tongues to eternal silence, and all the œconomy of their bodies to total dissolution. Perhaps we may see a magnificent tomb, with fine inscriptions; read of the noble, the powerful, the potentate, the arbiter of peace and of war: but let us lift the stone which covers the cause of all this pomp; here we find only a little dust, and a few mouldering bones. We should find just as much under the green sod that covers the peasant's grave.

These reflections are common; they are obvious to the view of every one; yet they are not unworthy of this place, as they will afford us some lessons of great use in the Christian life.

We may labour to acquire a portion of honest fame, to augment our fortune, to establish our reputation, and sweeten, as far as we can, the cares of life; for this the morality of the gospel does not con-

denn: but still we must carry this labour no farther than it deserves; it must not be our *chief* care. We must remember, that as the riches, grandeur, and reputation of the earth, are not the greatest happiness we have to hope for; so earthly poverty, obscurity, and meanness, are not the greatest evils we have to fear: that, therefore, to shun the greatest evil, and acquire the greatest good, ought always to be the object of our most ardent desires, to which all others ought of course to yield.

To the rich and the powerful, beneficence and generosity constitute real grandeur. Let them practise those virtues, and fulfil their engagements. Let their bowels be ever open to the necessities of the unhappy, and their ears to the cries of distress. Let them never fly from an occasion of doing good, but be the general refuge and blessing of society.

To the poor and the lowly, on the other side, submission and patience constitute greatness of soul. Even though God had put an essential difference between them
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and the great, it would be their wisdom to submit patiently; because they could not murmur, without sin, that God had made them what they are, and not angels or seraphim. Though therefore some essential privileges had been connected with earthly grandeur, yet still submission would have been the duty of the low: but this is not their case. God has given to the great ones of the earth an exterior glory, transient, and superficial; but to the humble and the patient he hath given that glory which is real, solid, and permanent: and what is there difficult to a wise man in submitting to this order of Providence.

It may, in some respects indeed, be mortifying to lurk in the lowest ranks of society, when one feels sentiments of greatness and elevation in the soul. It is mortifying to depend for bread on a man like ourselves, and be spurned under the feet of our fellow-creatures: but those things will pass away; soon will the curtain drop, and the actors be reduced to their natural equality; soon shall we enter on a world where

those distinctions shall be abolished, and all that is great in the immortal mind shine forth in full splendor. Let us aspire after this happy period; and make it the object of our most ardent wishes. May that Almighty Being, who is "the Maker of all men, bring them at last to meet together." As we here meet in the participation of the same nature, the same privileges, the same destination, and the same end; so may we then meet in the participation of the same glory.

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S E R M O N XII.

P R O V. xxiii. 23.

B U Y T H E T R U T H.

“**W**HAT is truth?” said Pilate to the Saviour of the world: and this question every man finds occasion often to put; for there is perhaps no turn in common use of which the meaning is less distinguished. Truth subsists of itself in every subject, independent of the reflections of the human mind: but this meaning it cannot have in the preceptive passages of the sacred scripture; for, when we are exhorted to *seek the truth*, to *love the truth*, or to *buy the truth*, the word is used to signify that relation which subsists between objects and the mind; to mark the agreement which every idea ought to have with its corresponding

corresponding object. To *seek the truth*, is to seek after just ideas of such objects as employ our reflections: to *buy the truth*, is to make all the sacrifices that are found necessary to facilitate this search. The word, taken in this sense, is one of those abstract terms of which it is hardly possible to determine the sense precisely, unless we determine the object to which it is attributed; for there is a species of truth peculiar to every art and science: the courtier gains truth at the expence of servile compliance and mean dissimulation: the merchant gains truth at the expence of his repose, his health, and sometimes his conscience: the mathematician spends whole days and nights, secluded from all the pleasures of life, to find, by the proportion of figures, and the combination of numbers, the solution of some problem. But it is not to such truths as these that the scripture directs our view: they have perhaps their value, though it is seldom so much as men pay for them. Neither can we restrict the precept to such truths alone as

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concern religion; for the expression being vague, it presents to the mind an idea of general or universal truth. Are we then exhorted to acquire distinct notions of the whole circle of beings, and to learn the perfection of all arts and sciences? No, surely! because the duration of human life, and the faculties of the human mind are unfit for so vast a design. The meaning of the exhortation therefore seems to be, that we should endeavour to acquire that happy disposition of soul, which will make us give to every question the time and attention it deserves; to every proof its due force; to every difficulty its full weight; and to every advantage its true value. This is the only aptitude for universal truth: and with such a disposition we can go as far in the knowledge of particular truths as the talents we have received from Heaven, and the circumstances in which Providence hath placed us, will allow.

But this disposition cannot be had for nought; it must be acquired by attention
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and toil: it must be bought by the sacrifice of dissipation and of indolence. A certain modern philosopher [Mallebranche, viz.] carried this thought very far. He supposed that the soul of man is united to two very different beings; 1st, to that portion of matter which constitutes his body; and, 2dly, to God, to the eternal wisdom, to the universal reason. He supposed that, as the motions which are excited in our brain are the cause of our sensations, and an effect of the union of the soul with the body, so attention is the occasional cause of our reflections and ideas; and that these are effects of the soul's union with God, with the eternal wisdom, with the universal reason. This system has been discarded, as no more than a philosophical romance: but yet it contains a great deal of good sense with regard to the necessity and advantages of attention. Attention signifies that act of the mind which gathers our wandering ideas, and fixeth them upon one object; opposed to which is dissipation or distraction, which scatters them upon numberless

less objects, while they ought to be employed only upon one. A single reflection or two will serve to convince us, that the temple of truth is inaccessible, unless by the introductory sacrifice of this irregularity.

We can easily observe in what narrow bounds the mind of man is confined; how defective its powers are, and how limited their operations. If, therefore, when it is necessary to consider some combined proposition, we do not bestow upon it proportionable attention, we shall infallibly overlook some of its properties, and, consequently, our conclusion will be partial and absurd. This reasoning is confirmed by invariable experience: for every man may remember some things which have appeared false or true, certain or doubtful, according to the hurry or the attention with which he examined them. Whence comes it that, in certain hours of retirement and calm recollection of thought, religion seems the only thing worthy of our regard; and that we say with the Psalmist, “Thou
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alone art my portion, O Lord?" Whence comes it that, at the hearing of some discourse in which our attention is by some means commanded, that we say with the people of Israel, "All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient?" Whence comes it that, on the bed of death, we acknowledge so feelingly the instability of earthly things, and exclaim with king Solomon, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit?" Whence comes it, on the contrary, that, in our years of vigour and health, we find those earthly things so real and solid? Whence comes it, that the proofs which we think so strong in the church, lose all their evidence in a few days—perhaps in a few hours? And whence comes it, that the commerce of the world can overthrow those systems of piety which we form in our closets? Is it that there is nothing fixed in the nature of things? Is it that truth is only a denomination of opinion, or a mode of conception? Can those things which are true in the church, in
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the closet, or in the temperance of our passions, become false out of the church, out of the closet, or when our passions are inflamed? No! for truth itself is unchangeable. But in the former cases, the circumstances in which we are, concentrate our thoughts on the study of truth; whereas, in the latter, the world and the passions divide them, and they are necessarily weakened by the division.

This dissipation of thought is not only the most common cause of our errors in speculation, but also of our practical mistakes. We declaim, at times, too severely against the malice and depravity of the world: for, to render men sensible of divine or moral truths, there is generally little more needful than to command their attention. We find their hearts accessible to acts of justice, of gratitude, of charity; and if their conduct appears but faintly tinged with these virtues, the reason is, that the continual fluctuation of temporal things distracts them, and that ignorance and error are the inseparable companions of distraction.

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To acquire this habitual attention is commonly a toilsome work, and therefore demands the sacrifice of our indolence. The labour of the mind is evidently more wearisome than that of the body: for we may see the greatest part of mankind submitting without repugnance to the heaviest bodily toil, rather than suffer that which is mental. This labour however is surmountable; and, like all others, by custom, may be rendered easy. A man, nursed up in delicacy, and used to repose and softness, will bear with great difficulty the fatigues of war—to fly from place to place, to be parched in the heat of the sun, and pinched in the frost of the night: it is only habit which can inure the body to those fatigues. In the same manner, a man who is accustomed to fly from place to place, to be parched in the heat of the sun, and pinched in the frost of the night, whose body seems to have changed its nature, and to have contracted the hardness of iron or stone—this man is not able perhaps to support any efforts of attention, because
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it is only habit which can make this supportable. Exercise is therefore necessary to acquire the faculty of continued attention, which, when once acquired, will enable us to compare the most sublime ideas, and to investigate the most abstruse parts of knowledge. Then shall we reckon as nothing the sacrifices we have made; and the truth, when we have obtained it, will never be deemed too dear. It will open to us a fruitful source of pleasures; it will form us to fill with propriety our different employments; it will rid us of all troublesome scruples; and render us intrepid at the approach of death.

The placid and serene pleasures of the intellect are beyond comparison sweeter than those which are excited merely by the gross organs of sense, or by the more turbulent passions of the soul. And if the pleasure of advancing in human knowledge be very great, as it is universally allowed to be, what charms must accom-

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pany the attainment of that knowledge which concerns the things of immortality! Yet the man of the world, who is accustomed to view religion in a vague and superficial manner, perceives nothing of those pleasures; to him they have no form nor comeliness. Of what avail, he thinks, is the explanation of a passage, the cause of a phenomenon, the arrangement of a system? He sees something more noble in the design of the courtier, who spends his life in dancing vain attendance on the great: he sees something more solid in the projects of the gamester, who means to raise his fortune at one stroke on the wrecks of his neighbour: he sees something more entertaining in the speculations of the politician, who regulates, in his fancy, the earth and the sea, and looks for intelligence from every quarter of the globe. But his thoughts are vain, proceeding from ignorance of the subject which he pretends to despise. The soul, which is engaged in the study of truth, would not forego one hour of its
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beloved retirement for all his boasted delights. It is in retirement that our attention can exert its full force, and consider religion in all its views. There we compare it with the voice of conscience, with the desires of the heart, and with the general concert of all the creatures: there we adore the God of nature, and admire his wondrous works: there we view the harmony of the sacred authors, the connection of the different æconomies, and the coincidence of prophecies with their accomplishment; how the promise which was made to Adam was renewed to Abraham, confirmed to Moses, published by the prophets, and accomplished in Jesus Christ: there we see religion as a succession of truths depending on each other; as one eternal chain, of which no link can be broken, hung forth at first in heaven by the hand of Infinite Mercy, and disappearing at last among the effulgent beams of the Sun of Righteousness. This is the glorious path which we trace in our search

of truth; and we justly prefer it to the perplexed labyrinths of avarice, luxury, and ambition. Truth will enable us, besides, to fill with propriety the different employments to which we are called in society. Religion, no doubt, hath views more noble and elevated than that of fitting us to practise any worldly arts: but the advantages of truth are not confined to religion. A man who has cultivated his mind will distinguish himself in every station; and a man whose way of thinking is erroneous or futile, will in every station be pitied or despised. This remark principally regards the heads of families. It is natural for us to love, and wish, to see our children advanced to eminent ranks: if this desire be innocent, it must engage us to educate them in a manner suitable to their destination. Let their reason be cultivated; and let those accomplishments be looked upon as most essential, which are best calculated to rectify their opinions, and to form their judgment.

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Truth will, moreover, free us from every importunate and troublesome scruple. "To be tossed about with every wind of doctrine," is a most violent situation; and yet it is a situation which none can avoid, except those who are seriously engaged in the study of truth, or those who are utterly insensible. We see an almost infinite number of sects, which are diametrically opposite to each other, and which mutually anathematize and declare one another eternally accursed: how shall we here distinguish the true church? In the religion which we profess, we acknowledge mysteries which cannot be explained: how can we guard against suspecting that faith which covers itself in obscurities? We are sensible of the great care that was taken to impress the doctrines of faith upon our minds in infancy: how shall we distinguish whether those are certainties, or errors received by prejudice? These and other jarring reflections render the soul a confused and troubled chaos of

light and darkness: but from such gloomy ideas the disciple of truth is free; not only because the object of his pursuit possesseth such bright characters as distinguish it infallibly from falsehood; but also, because it is not possible that God should allow a man of this stamp to live in fundamental errors: and as to errors of a lesser kind, if he does not remove them entirely, he will at last pardon them, as infirmities inseparable from humanity.

Finally, the value of truth appears in the serenity which it procures at the approach of death? The famous story of Cato Uticensis is well known, yet not unworthy of being mentioned in this place. Having resolved to quit this world, he wished much to be assured that there was another: for this purpose he read over attentively Plato's book concerning the immortality of the soul; and the reasonings of that philosopher satisfied him so fully, that he died with the greatest tranquility. He saw beyond the grave another Rome, where

where tyranny could have no dominion, where Pompey could be no more oppressed, and Cæsar could triumph no more. It is beautiful to consider a heathen thus persuading himself of the soul's immortality; and we are grieved to find that he stained those reflections by suicide: but yet that fortitude which was the result of his meditations is worthy of our imitation. So long as the soul fluctuates between light and darkness, between persuasion and doubt; so long as it has only presumptions and probabilities in favour of religion; it is nearly impossible to behold death without dread: but the Christian who is enlightened, confirmed, and strengthened, being raised above his power, is secure from all his terrors. If Cato the heathen could brave this terrible king, what would not Cato the Christian have done? If the disciple of Plato could believe and exult in the thought of a future state, what ought not the disciple of Jesus to do? If some proofs, dictated by reason, could calm the agitations of a soul

in darkness, shall not we be calm and serene who are blest with clear revelation and infallible assurance? May the Almighty grant us to know the value of truth by such experience.

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S E R M O N XIII.

M A T T. xiii. 30.

LET BOTH GROW TOGETHER UNTIL
THE HARVEST.

THE use which we ought to make of the vices and virtues of our fellow-creatures, though little attended to, is an essential duty of the Christian life. The mixture of good and bad, of wheat and of tares, which the wisdom of God has permitted in the world, is certainly intended for the advantage of both; for we see, in the parable, that when the servants spoke to the father of the family of rooting out the tares which the enemy had sown, he disapproved of their zeal, and gave

gave them to understand, that this mixture, though seemingly injurious to his honour, was yet necessary to be allowed. This mixture, however, which is tolerated for the correction of vice and the proof of virtue, seems only to furnish matter of seduction or discouragement to the one, and of censure and detraction to the other: this mixture, which might be so useful to all, is become pernicious to all: the good can hardly suffer a sinner; and sinners can hardly support the presence of a good man: they are mutually a burden to each other. But this reciprocal hatred being both absurd and pernicious, it is of consequence, therefore, to consider the reasons and uses of this conduct of Providence; for virtue and vice are so mingled on the earth, that nothing deserves more to be explained than those rules of faith that teach the sinner what use he may draw from the society of the just, and the just man what advantage he may reap from the inevitable commerce of sinners.

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At first sight, it would seem more glorious to our great lawgiver to have made himself a church here on earth without spot or blemish; the natural image of the heavenly Jerusalem, that church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. It would seem absurd, that a field, watered by his sacred blood, should bring forth tares among the good grain; that a fold, of which he is the shepherd, should be infested with unclean beasts; or that a body, of which he is the head, should have members that serve iniquity.

It is true, indeed, that good men form the essential and inseparable part of the church; but yet, though the wicked are only as the blemishes of this divine body, they belong no less to it. The church regards them as her children, and suffers them as her members, foiled and maimed indeed, but still her members, enjoying a thousand means of salvation from their society with the just, which, if they were cut off, must utterly fail them.

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The just have eyes too single and lips too innocent to applaud the sinner in the desires of his heart. They disdain the interested language of flattery, which mankind use for deceiving one another: with a noble simplicity, they call that good which is indeed good, and that evil which is really so: they know that a Christian is the public witness of truth, and that it is base to sacrifice it to vain complaisance or vile interest: they believe that in heaven is kept a constant record of all their deeds; and they reflect, that though one may conceal from men the low dissimulation of a double heart, yet such practice is vain before that Infinite Being who searcheth the inward parts. In these sentiments, therefore, they love their brethren too well to deceive them; they are too much moved with their errors to approve them; they desire their salvation too strongly to become their flattering counsellors, or accomplices of their destruction: they may, at times, be silent, because it is not always proper to speak; but they will not speak unless

unless to give glory to the truth; and vice will never hear from their mouth any mean adulation to praise it, or artful softening to justify it.

But not only are good men the depositaries and witnesses of truth upon earth; their words are even possessed of a certain authority which virtue alone can give; a weight and force which is not to be found in the speech of others. The sinner, to whatever height he may be raised, loseth, by his errors, the right of reproof to those who err: his vices weaken his instructions; the weakness of his conduct defeats the utility of his counsel; and his manners leave no credence to his word. But the good man can, with confidence, condemn in others what he has before forbid to himself: his innocence makes his censure respectable, and his instructions will not blush at his conduct. Thus, involuntarily, we give to the righteous a kind of dominion over us: however powerful and impatient of reproof in other respects, yet to the reproof of virtue we submit; and,

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it appears, that they who shall one day judge the angels, have, at present, a right to be the judges of men. Thus did John Baptist, with no other apparent authority but his virtue, arise up the censor of a voluptuous court: Herod respected his sanctity, and feared his reproofs. Thus Elijah came alone into the midst of Samaria, where they sought his life, and threatened Ahab with divine vengeance: the trembling prince humbled himself, put on sack-cloth, and went softly. And thus did Samuel, armed only with the dignity of his age and office, come before Saul, the conqueror of Amalec, surrounded with all his victorious troops, and reproach him for his ingratitude and disobedience: the monarch, so intrepid before his enemies, was forsaken of all his fierceness before the prophet, acknowledged his sin, and used every method to appease him.—Sacred authority of virtue! how firmly is it stamped with the seal of Heaven! and how clearly do its bright characters demonstrate its divine original!

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It is necessary, however, that this authority, which is inseparable from virtue, be conducted with circumspection, with the prudence and tenderness of charity. Good men are well aware of this caution. They have been taught to be instant in season and out of season; but they have been also taught, that though all things are lawful, yet all are not expedient. They know that wounds of the heart require to be treated with great care; and that, in this case, if a remedy is meant to be useful, it must be made agreeable. They know that there is a time to weep for sin in secret, and a time to reprove it openly; that the same charity which hates the sin must tolerate the sinner to correct him; and that virtue has authority no longer than it has discretion and prudence.

Guided by such reflections, virtue is amiable even while it reproves. He knows it not who represents it under the idea of a bitter and imprudent zeal; which corrects without discernment, and condemns without indulgence. Charity is neither

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rash nor inhuman: it knows to choose the moment of instruction, and to manage its instruction with indulgence; it knows to be useful, without making itself odious. If these characters are wanting, it is no longer charity, which reproves and edifies; it is humour, which censures and offends. Charity is soft and prudent; humour always pungent and rash. The prophet Nathan did not come sourly to reproach king David for the scandal of his conduct: he insinuated his reproof gradually and artfully; he made the truth be loved before he told it; he made the sin hateful before he blamed the sinner; and by the innocent contrivance of a most ingenious and beautiful parable, he found the secret of correcting vice, without giving offence; and of making the king pronounce sentence against himself.

Such are the ways in which the wicked may profit by the advice and reproof of the just: and so far we may observe the advantages that result from the mixture of good and bad men in the world. The doctrine

trine will receive still more light, by considering how the righteous may profit by their commerce with sinners. Negligence, and weariness or disgust, are the greatest dangers that threaten men in the course of virtue. After a recent conversion, or in the beginnings of piety, the heart is fearful and diffident. Instructed by the remembrance of his past miscarriages, to watch over his weakness, a man is easily warned of danger, alarmed, and recalled to himself. Hardly escaped from shipwreck, he walks, like St. Peter, trembling over the waves, starting at every blast, and fearing at every surge to be swallowed in the deep. These pious terrors are but too soon dispelled. In proportion as the remembrance of our past wanderings goes off, the sense of our weakness grows fainter: the days which we have already past in virtue seem to answer for those which are to come; precautions are neglected, and fear is no more. Against so dangerous a failing, nothing is more useful to good men than their attention to the wicked. In

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the fall of their brethren, they find lessons of continual vigilance. In the view of one common nature, they perceive that every one has the same weakness to dread; and that nothing but steady attention can make a difference. In the history of other men's misfortunes, they learn what are the steps that lead insensibly to wickedness; that its beginnings are always slight; and that the least step yielded to the enemy gives him a sad advantage over the soul. Among the numbers that fall before their eyes, they see perhaps some who were once as ardent in the ways of God as they, and as little dreamed of falling from that happy state. They see, and tremble for themselves; they see that vigilance is the only security of virtue, and that *neglect* is not far distant from *revolt*.

But farther—If, concealed from the world, the righteous lived altogether separated from the wicked, it is more than probable that great decays would ensue. In those moments when the heart fatigued recoils; when a man is weary of himself,

self, and feels no sensible taste for piety; he might think of unknown pleasures and joys in the world, greater than those afforded by religion: but the mere view of sinners dissipates this illusion. The good have no need of faith to convince them of the false felicity of sin; they need only to open their eyes: they will look for happy men in the world, and find them not; they will see on every hand agitations and tumults which are called pleasures, but in these no portion of true happiness; they will see among sinners a thousand times more weariness, more disgust at a dissipated life, than ever is felt in the course of virtue; they will see that the unruly passions of sinners cause all their misfortunes and all their woe; and that the heart of the good man, which is free from these, can have no pain but the negative one, of not being sufficiently sensible to its happiness.

These are the happy effects produced by the mixture of the good and the wicked on earth. Considering it, therefore, in this view, it behoves us to determine impar-

tially to which of these classes we belong, that, by regulating our conduct accordingly, we may answer the designs of God's providence. But in this scrutiny, without doubt, we shall find something of both characters in ourselves: for, as we are certainly assured that no man is perfectly good, so we may charitably hope that no man is entirely wicked; and, therefore, in the instruction that this doctrine affords, every one is concerned. Let the good remember that they are set among sinners as witnesses of truth, and supporters of virtue: let them pursue this end, by administering their advice to their wandering brethren; by striving to reclaim such as have erred and are deceived: but let all their reproofs be guided by prudence, and dictated by charity; let bitterness and wrath be for ever banished: above all, let them enforce their precepts by their good example; for what serves it to point out to others the way to Heaven, while our conduct declares that we disdain to walk in it? Let them crown all by fervent prayers to
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that Omnipotent Being who alone can order the wills of men, and before whom the prayer of the righteous is of great avail. As for such as are still tares in the divine field, let them regard the just as the means of their salvation; listen to their instructions, and imitate their example, till, by their respect for virtue, they shall merit the grace of sanctification and perseverance, from Him, with whom no sentiment of faith and piety shall go without its reward.

S E R M O N XIV.

J O H N. viii. 36.

IF THE SON THEREFORE SHALL MAKE
YOU FREE, YE SHALL BE FREE IN-
DEED.

NO passion is stronger in the human mind than the love of liberty. For this we abandon many a hopeful project, and look with disdain on pompous slavery; for this we expose ourselves to a thousand hardships, and court independance, though attended with toil. When conscious of confinement, no gratification can please us; and, when conscious of freedom, we despise all trouble. Every man naturally considers himself as free-born, as heir of that charter by which the Almighty gave
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to man dominion over all the earth. Hence every man loves to think for himself, and to act for himself; loves to regulate his mental faculties, and arrange his outward circumstances, as far as he can, according to his own taste: hence all restraint becomes odious to him, whether it be imposed on his understanding, his will, his conscience, or his condition. By considering a freedom of operation in these few particulars, we may form an idea of true liberty; which will at once shew us what most contributes to destroy or to preserve it, what is its greatest friend, and what its greatest enemy.

The liberty of man, with regard to the understanding, consists in the power of suspending his judgment till he hath viewed an object on every side, and in not being determined at last but by sufficient evidence. This power of suspension, in finite minds, supplies the defects that are occasioned by the narrowness of their capacities. It dwells not in that Infinite Spirit, the Father of the universe; because it is in-

consistent with the perfection of his attributes. At one view he perceives all the objects in the train of past and future existence, with all their various circumstances; he sees every truth intuitively, and needs no proofs to determine his judgment. But it is not so with finite spirits, and especially with spirits so finite as ours. If at any time we pretend to determine in haste, we commit mistakes at every step: we take a false gleam for a real light, and the appearance of truth for truth itself. The liberty of suspending our judgment is the only means we have to prevent those misfortunes: this will not guard us from ignorance, but it will guard us from error; for as long as I have the liberty of affirming only what I know for certain, so long I have the liberty of not being deceived.

I call, 2dly, the will of man free, when it is in perfect harmony with an enlightened understanding; in opposition to that which is drawn away by irregular desires, which are by the understanding condemned. The slavery of a will which is not free to follow

follow whatever the understanding represents as advantageous, this slavery is so hard, that some have questioned whether it was possible, and others have determined it to be impossible. Without deciding this speculative doubt, it is certain that the most ordinary artifice of a disorderly will is to seduce the understanding. There is no truth so bright but it may be darkened by curious arts: there is no falsehood which may not be cunningly dressed in the garb of truth; there is no condition so advantageous but it may be represented as troublesome; there is no condition so fatal but in some light may appear advantageous. Availing itself of this, an irregular will solicits the understanding to present the evil it desires in such a light as to appear good; and in this manner, contrary to the order of nature, determination precedes reflection. A free will, therefore, can only be such a one as accords with the dictates of a clear understanding, following those implicitly and without resistance; neither endeavouring to seduce nor to blind its guide.

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That faculty of the soul, which we call the conscience, may be said to be composed of these two which I have already mentioned. It is the understanding, when it presents to us an object under the relation of just or unjust; and it is the will, when it makes this the object of our love or hatred, of our hope or fear. These are only diversities of operations, but the same spirit. What I have already observed, therefore, of the liberty of the understanding and the will, may serve us to determine what is meant by the freedom of the conscience. The conscience is free, with regard to reasoning, when it has strong impressions of justice and injustice, and when it can suspend its decision of any point till it hath calmly considered every side. The conscience is free, with regard to volition, when it can follow what appears just, and refuse what appears contrary to the laws of justice.

I have only farther to observe, what we are to understand by freedom of condition; that is, whether a man be rich or poor, in
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obscurity or exposed to the public view, in health or in sickness, and such like. In this respect a man is free when he can chuse whate state of life seems best. Thus Solomon was free when he had all the goods of the world at his choice. On the contrary, a man is a slave when he is detained in a condition that opposeth his happiness; when, ex-desiring life, he is constrained to die; or when, seeking for death, he cannot find him, and is forced to live.

From these ideas of liberty, I deduce two observations, which I apprehend will clearly follow, that liberty is incompatible with sin; and that, if the Son of God shall make us free, we shall be free indeed. In other words, that the sinner is the greatest of slaves; and that the Christian religion alone can remedy the disorders of nature, and give true freedom to man.

The first of these propositions is so very obvious, that the reflection of my hearers will probably anticipate what I can say in illustration of it. Is the sinner free in his understanding? hath he power to suspend his

his judgments? he, who is continually hurried by his passions to sensible things, and called off from the study of truth? he, whose understanding is constantly solicited by a corrupted will to use false notions of right and wrong, and to represent every object so as to favour its corruption? Is he free in his will and his conscience? No! these are mutual deceivers to each other, and authorize, by their judgments, the most frivolous decisions, and the most extravagant designs. But how soon are these maladies cured by the faith of Jesus Christ! By this we are made free indeed in our understandings; for he is the messenger of the counsels of God, the word that conceiveth them, and the wisdom that directs them: he knows them perfectly, and to whom he will he can communicate that knowledge. By that universal sway over nature, which he hath obtained in consequence of his obedience, he can calm those passions that disturb our understandings, and precipitate their judgments: he can direct those wills that seduce them; he can rectify those er-

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roneous consciences that delude them; he can make us free in all our actions and in all our faculties.

But constraints upon the freedom of condition are most obvious to the feelings of all men; and therefore this point demands a closer consideration, as by it we may perceive, in the clearest light, the contrast between the slavery of sin and the freedom of the gospel. I have said, that freedom of condition consists in being able to chuse the state which seems best; and let us here acknowledge the miserable slavery of the sinner. He may disregard, perhaps, whether he lives in riches or poverty, in fame or obscurity, during the small number of his years; but to be forced to die, when he hath infinite reason to fear death; and to be forced to live, when life becomes grievous—these are hardships which he cannot disregard, and these are hardships which he must undergo. He lives in this world as in a prison, whose deceitful pleasures may at times make him forget his true state; but still it is his prison,

prison, from whence he must depart when the inexorable hour calls him to punishment: and how shall he conceal from himself that fatal necessity? how shall he draw clouds around that fearful barrier, when age and infirmities hurry him towards it? The only art he hath left is to confuse his mind with noise, with business, and with pleasures—like those condemned criminals, to whom the justice of men grants some hours for preparing themselves to appear before the justice of God, and those they spend in intoxicating their reason, that they may not tremble at the sight of the scaffold. Such is the state of the sinner: but when the noise that resounds in his ears is laid; when those affairs that take up his attention are suspended; when the charms of those pleasures that enchant him are worn away; when this thought intrudes upon his mind—I must die, and I must soon die—it is then that he feels his chains, and groans beneath them; it is then that his visage is changed, and his eyes troubled; and it

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is thus that "through fear of death he is all his life-time subject to bondage." Yet still his slavery were not so hard, if, when he is tired of existence, he could destroy it: but as he must die when he fears death, so he must live even when his life shall be burthensome. A superior Power has decreed his existence to be endless; and in vain shall he seek death, for he shall not find him: in vain he shall curse the day of his birth, and call on the rocks and the mountains to cover him. What can the rocks and the mountains do against the will of him at whose presence they melt like wax before the fire? The sinner must live to expiate his crimes, and wish for annihilation and oblivion in vain.

What can deliver from this slavery? who shall deliver us from this body of death? Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory by Jesus Christ our Lord: he has re-established the order which sin had reversed; made that death, which is the object of the sinner's fears on earth, the hope of the just; made that oblivion, which the wicked

wicked hope for, to be the abhorrence of the good; made even that eternal existence, which we shall enjoy after this life, the subject of our joy and triumph. Death, it is true, is still an evil, even to the saints; for though our Lord hath overcome this strong one, and freed us from his empire, yet this freedom shall not be compleat till the consummation of all things; agreeable to what St. Paul hath observed, “that the last enemy which shall be overcome is death.” It is not, therefore, as yet, time for us to brave this foe; nor, till our souls and bodies are finally united at the resurrection, can we exclaim, “O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?” Yet for this the infidel hath no cause to insult the believer, nor to treat good men as visionaries, because they boast of vanquishing death, even when they are falling under his stroke. There is an infinite difference between the fear of death in the soul of the sinner, and in that of the good Christian: the one fears it, because he regards it as the end of all his pleasures,
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and the beginning of his punishment: the other fears it only as an evil; but at the same time desires it as the last of his evils, to which he must necessarily submit to arrive at supreme felicity. Looking beyond that gloomy object, he discovers the glory that shall succeed; in the hope of which he even desires what he fears, and beholds with calmness the approach of the terrible king. Above all, the eternal duration of the future glory is the great cause of transport to the good. The more the condition of the saints is glorious, the more it would be miserable, if it could possibly have an end: this is the great character of vanity inseparable from earthly glory. But to be happy, and to think that we shall be for ever so; to enjoy the society of angels, and to reflect that we shall enjoy it for ever; to behold the face of God, and to think that we shall behold it for ever; thus to anticipate the endless pleasures which we shall possess in every indivisible part of eternity; this is supreme felicity; and this is the greatest privilege of that liberty which Jesus

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Christ

Christ hath purchased for us. And shall any thing tear us from his communion, which can bestow rewards so inestimable? Shall we forego the liberty of the sons of God, and become the miserable slaves of sin? Ought we not rather to regard with detestation every thing that tends to separate us from this blessed fellowship? I speak not only of hereticks and infidels; I speak not only of tyrants and persecutors of this world—I speak of the world itself; of the pernicious maxims of indolence and of luxury, a thousand times more fatal to Christian freedom than all the tyrants and infidels of the earth. Let neither “ death, therefore, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor heighth, nor depth, nor any other creature, be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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S E R M O N XV.

J O B, xlii. 12.

SO THE LORD BLESSED THE LATTER
END OF JOB MORE THAN HIS BE-
GINNING.

THE book of Job has always been admired, by persons of taste, as one of the most beautiful remains of Oriental writing, which the wastes of time and vicissitudes of human things have suffered to come down to us. Some have denied the narration it contains to be historical; but no one ever denied it to be interesting, affecting, and in the highest degree instructive; and, though we should consider it merely as a poetical composition, designed

to convey the noblest lessons of morality in the most charming dress that fancy and invention can bestow, it will not be hazarded by the supposition; for it will stand the test of just criticism, as a regular and finished drama. But although there be circumstances in it which cannot be understood literally as facts, and which therefore seem to give the whole a fictitious air; yet the general colouring of the characters, both principal and subordinate, is so agreeable to truth and nature, as shews them to have been taken from real life. The most probable opinion therefore is, that the story is a true one, embellished by fiction; according to the universal practice of the ancient tragedians, who never invented their plots, but took them from the records or traditions of history, with such alterations as were necessary to render them dramatic. Whatever be in this, the character of Job is beautiful and instructive: it may always be viewed with delight and advantage.

He is introduced to us as one of the richest men in all the East; his family powerful,

powerful, his substance great, his influence extensive. This situation, to a man of unstable principles and wavering virtue, would certainly have been very dangerous. We must not be misled by the pastoral ideas of flocks, herds, and shepherds, plains, meadows, woods, and springs, to ascribe to those patriarchal ages perpetual innocence and peace. In a wide country, partially inhabited, and subject to no settled law, a state so blissful, alas! can never long have place. Some Sabeans or Chaldeans there will always be; some wandering tribes, excited by avarice or the spirit of enterprize, to make depredations on their quiet neighbours, till, inured to the trade of war, they hate and forsake all others, and depend for their cruel subsistence on rapine and violence. Hence devastation and barbarity invade and profane the peaceful regions which by nature seem formed for the abodes of simplicity and happiness. By his wealth, and the number of his dependants, Job was well qualified for such undertakings; and, had he been one

who set at nought the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, he might, no doubt, have gotten himself dominion in the vast extent of the eastern world, and become a great man. He became, what is a thousand times better, a good man. His heart would not allow him to be the cause of woe: he loved more to alleviate and remove misery than to create it: he “delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and the helpless.” “The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him; and he caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy: he was a father to the poor; he was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.” How amiable is this character! how much superior, in the eyes of reason and humanity, to those daring mortals who desolate the earth and drench it in blood! who never had a sigh for woe, nor a tear for pity! who can behold distraction and ruin with unconcern, and even exult over scenes of carnage and cruelty! Yet these are the men whom prejudice and opinion style great. Surely it is a fatal greatness! How different the man
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of benevolence! Serene and mild; happy himself, and wishing all others so; with a heart open as the air, and warm as the sun, cheering and blessing all around him. How different is this man from the stern and ruthless conqueror, who, grasping at whole nations, thinks private distress beneath his notice, and, intoxicated with his proud elevation, overlooks the numberless miseries by which he hath risen so high! If there be a heart which can prefer the latter of these characters, it is a heart which I never wish to know.

Thus Job lived in prosperous virtue: but virtue in prosperity is neither secure nor complete. It is a plant which thrives not always basking in the sunshine; the adverse storm is useful to harden it, and give it deeper root. Sudden and dreadful was the storm which burst upon the head of Job. We see him, in one short day, despoiled of all his rich possessions, and, what to so good a heart as his must have been a much more torturing stroke, deprived of all his children at one calamitous

blow; and, as if this complication of exterior misfortunes, as if these troubles, affailing on every side, had been insufficient for the trial of his integrity, his flesh is infected with a grievous and painful disease. Our sympathy and sorrow are now as deeply affected as our admiration and esteem were before. We enter into the sad reverse of this good man's fortune; we feel for him lying in the dust, in nakedness, want and pain. The discourses which pass between him and his friends in this piteous situation are replete with the noblest instruction: they are as an inexhaustible mine of sound morality, and deep observation on human life. The acrimonious expressions introduced in some of Job's speeches, which appear to favour of impatience, only serve to attach us more closely to him: they are most delicate strokes to heighten the picture, and give that exquisite finishing on which the truth of character depends.

Were his complaints the mere wailings of despondency, we might suspect his feeling. If he complained not at all, but
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rather gloried in his calamities—this would be out of nature; we could take no part in it; our sympathy could not go along with virtue so sublime; but while we see him alive to all his woes, yet resigned to the great Inflictor of them; carrying his patience to the extreme verge of humanity, where it borders on angelic fortitude, yet still retaining all the feelings of a man—we are interested in every word, action, and circumstance that tends to bring on the catastrophe. The catastrophe at length arrives, wrought up with every stroke of pathos and sublime that can catch the attention or delight the heart. The Supreme Being himself is introduced, demonstrating the weakness and ignorance of man, and consequently his inability to determine concerning the justice of the various events appointed by Providence. A copious induction is given by this heavenly speaker of his own most amazing and curious works, with a strong and beautiful description of each. In conclusion, Job's friends are reprov'd for the unadvised severity

verity of their reasonings; most honourable testimony is borne to the rectitude of Job himself; he is raised from the abyss of misery to splendor, far exceeding what he formerly enjoyed; every possession and blessing is doubled to him; he lives long respected, and dies in a venerable and happy old age.

In reviewing this story with a design of drawing from it lessons of instruction, the difficulty lies not in the discovery, but in the selection of materials. Every page teems with sentences that speak to the understanding and the heart; every incident and change of fortune have in them something monitory; and there is hardly a case, in the ordinary course of human life, in which one might not advantageously consult the character of Job for advice.

Prosperity is the object of all human pursuits and desires; of all human acquisitions too it is the most difficult to be borne. "Where the carcase is, the eagles will be gathered together;" and where prosperity is, a crowd of temptations will ever be hovering

hovering around. In a prosperous state, that state most desirable and most dangerous, the conduct of Job is held forth as a pattern. Let the rich and the happy learn from him moderation in the enjoyments which affluence puts in their power, a total abstinence from all oppression, and a constant regard to exertions of charity and generosity: let them beware of wrapping themselves up in the selfish security of their own importance; hardened against the feeling of their neighbour's distress; dead to every joy that dignifies the nature of man, and alive to nothing but organic pleasure. Miserable perversion of Heaven's blessings! to employ that which might purchase the delights of angels, in the abuse and debasement even of humanity, till it is brought on a level with the brutes that perish. But even while their conscience bears witness to the rectitude of their designs and actions, let them not set their hearts too much on what they possess: neither riches, nor children, nor dearest friends, are given to man by perpetual tenure; and that man

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is but ill prepared to bear a reverse of fortune, who never imagined such a reverse possible. Reason, therefore, must frequently represent the instability of all earthly things, which will teach us both to use them well and bear the loss of them with decency. Virtue cannot prevent the attacks of calamity, but it can give strength to support them. The integrity and benevolence of Job could not hinder the roving free-booters of the East from plundering his wealth, the lightning from burning his servants, the hurricane from burying his children, nor disease from invading his own flesh; but the sweet remembrance of them could inspire him with vigour to bear all those miseries with a degree of patience unequalled here below. It is in this that his example is invaluable.

It is not the lot of every man to be intrusted with riches and power; but it is the lot of every man to suffer some portion of distress. The uses of those afflicting visitations are innumerable, and very often unknown: but this we know well, that
 murmurs

murmurs and complaints are utterly vain; they may aggravate, but cannot remove, the incumbent woe. How much better is it, how much more becoming those who profess to believe a divine Providence, which dispenses both prosperity and pain according to the rules of justice and mercy, to bear with humble submission distresses which no human power can command away. In such resignation there is something noble and meritorious, and its consequences will prove it the wisest choice. A man of extreme sensibility, indeed, on the first onset of calamity, cannot always preserve an equal mind; he will be tempted to resent the stroke which he thinks undeserved; or even, like Job, to curse the day of his birth, and wish he had dropt from his cradle into his grave. But this torrent of passion soon subsides: it is as the bursting forth of confined waters; the turbulence is soon over, and the stream runs smooth and clear: he will deeply humble himself before that awful Being whose judgments no force can resist; whose
counsels

counsels no wisdom can search out: he will adore the invisible hand which, for some good cause unknown to him, removes what perhaps constituted the sole felicity of his life: he will consecrate his sufferings to Heaven, and beg of God to accept them as an atonement for his secret crimes: he will search into every corner of his heart, banish every lurking vice, cast out every foul desire, and establish fair virtue in full possession there. The man who thus improves the visitations of misfortune shall be "blessed of the Lord," and "his latter end made greater than his beginning:" a speedy and easy death shall either remove him to lands where no Sa-beans plunder, no lightnings blast, no storms overthrow; or smiling prosperity shall once more return to lift his head, and bid him flourish again among the sons of men. In either case he is blessed. If he dies, his virtues, his sufferings, his patience, become exemplary, and his memory is held dear. If he lives, the pains he hath borne will give him a fellow-feeling

ing with others in distress, and excite him to a perpetual desire of communicating happiness, which, naturally returning upon himself, will afford him an inexhaustible fund of the purest enjoyments a worthy heart can know. He shall step from this scene, where his virtue is honoured and loved, to another, where it shall be confirmed and crowned.

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S E R M O N XVI.

M A T T. xvi. 26.

WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EX-
CHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?

WH A T the human soul is, hath been often the subject of philosophic enquiry. Many accounts have been given of it, some of them different, and some even contradictory; but none completely satisfactory. In the dark ages, when many of the rules that were taught for regulating the understanding served only to perplex it; when to have the memory filled with a multitude of pompous and unintelligible terms was esteemed the perfection of science; in those ages it was
believed

believed that clear ideas might be obtained, and full descriptions given, of the soul; and in the succeeding ages, when morals and theology were freed from the jargon of the schools, and men's studies directed to disquisitions of real advantage, then philosophers arose, who dared hardly to pronounce any thing certain concerning the nature of the soul, who maintained that our notions of it must always be obscure, and that the height of our knowledge is to ascertain *what it is not*, rather than *what it is*. But if the temerity of the schoolmen, in their conceited decisions, was blameable, the affected reserve of the moderns seems also carried too far; for though perhaps we cannot give lights concerning this matter sufficient to satisfy a mind that is curious, and desirous of searching, yet we can give ideas so sublime as amply to verify the words of our Lord, that there is nothing, within the whole compass of created existence, worthy to be given in exchange for the soul.

In fact, there are three properties of the soul, which we distinctly understand; and every one is taught by experience, that it is capable of knowing, of willing, and of feeling. The first of these is understanding, the second volition, and the third sensibility. Understanding is the first property or faculty of the soul, and the first idea which we ought to form in considering its nature. The perfection of this faculty consists in having clear and distinct ideas, with certain and extensive knowledge. The depravation of it is to live in darkness and ignorance. The man who hath lost his soul in this respect, can never give any thing sufficiently precious in exchange; for knowledge and happiness, to intelligent creatures, are inseparable; and it is demonstrable, that a soul destitute of instruction can never be perfectly happy. This, nevertheless, is a truth which men are not easily persuaded of; and it must, I confess, be understood with great restrictions, with respect to us, while here on earth. On earth, our understandings are narrowly bounded.—

Questions

Questions most worthy of our curiosity and most proper to interest it, are often beyond our reach. The efforts which we make for enlarging the circle of our knowledge produce often no other fruit but mortifying reflections on the littleness of our minds, and the bounds that are set to our mental attainments.

On earth, the sciences are not always capable of demonstration, and often consist only of appearances and probabilities. A genius of any nicety is forced, on a thousand occasions, to doubt and suspend his judgment, and feels almost always the joy of a discovery, troubled by the just fear of having mistaken a shadow for a body, and a phantom for a reality. On earth, we see often true knowledge lose its lustre by the neglect of men,; while "science falsely so called" is crowned with their praises. A man full of abstruse speculations and scientific confusion is sometimes exalted above another, who, in all his researches, takes light and truth for his guides. It is foolish, indeed, for any one to let his happiness depend on

the opinions of others; yet it is highly natural for every one to love that approbation which is due to merit: and if this life were of very long duration, if the proximity of a final deliverance were not a powerful consolation in all our distresses, there could be nothing more mortifying than those unjust estimations.

Considering these imperfections, it is, therefore, not surprising that we are commonly so little convinced how much the enlargement of that faculty, which knows and reflects within us, might contribute to our happiness; and yet, even here, the improvements which we make, however small, uncertain, and disregarded, are found greatly to influence our state. Even here there is an extreme difference between a cultivated and an ignorant mind; between him who, from the history of mankind, perceiving what hath been advantageous or disastrous in former days, can profit by the vices and virtues of men who have been a thousand years dead, and him who is every moment exposed to the numberless errors
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that are inseparable from want of experience. But if even here a cultivated understanding hath any influence upon our happiness, what shall it have when our souls are freed from every weight that now retards their flights? What shall it have when we can taste to the full the delights of knowing and of understanding? when we can be instructed with certainty concerning the nature, the designs, and the perfections of the Supreme Eternal Being? when we shall discover the profound wisdom, the perfect justice, and complete harmony, that direct all those various events, which now often excite our amazement, and often give us offence? when every truth we learn shall be interesting, and a proof of the certainty, duration, and immutability of our happiness? Do we not perceive that such a happiness is above all price, and that the world has nothing worthy to be given in exchange for it?

The like observations we may make of the other faculties of our souls, volition and sensibility, that they are infinitely capable of contributing to our happiness,

though at present we can comprehend this but imperfectly. The perfection of our will consists in a due proportion between the holiness of our desires, and their fulness: but to whatever degree we may advance this holiness on earth, it must always be imperfect; and as we can but imperfectly follow its rules, so we can but imperfectly taste its delights: but we may judge what the loss of the soul in this respect is, from this one reflection, that in the future œconomy which our souls are destined for, the being most essentially holy is most perfectly happy, and the being most obstinately wicked is most completely miserable.

So, at present, we cannot comprehend to what degree that faculty of the soul, by which it feels, may be carried. Whatever miseries a man may feel on earth, a thousand casualties may diminish their bitterness. Sometimes the consolations of reason, sometimes those of religion, and sometimes both, deliver in all their strength from the mouth of a friend: at all times the certainty of death, which
quickly

quickly ends every mortal woe. The same reflections may be made on our sensations of pleasure, which are always mixed, suspended, and interrupted. Notwithstanding this, the present experience which we have of our sensibility will suffice to make us conceive how great the loss of the soul, in that respect, must be; and let the sensualist attend to this, who is indifferent to arguments drawn from any other topic. When we tell him of the pleasures of the understanding, he is nothing moved; for he fancies them imaginary: when we tell him of the happiness of virtue, and the miseries of remorse, he is as little moved: for he takes virtue to be folly, and remorse, weakness. But let him reflect on the sweetest delights he hath ever felt, and the cruellest tortures he hath either felt or feared; and let him think what it is to be deprived of the one, and exposed to the other. Besides, it would be easy to prove, that the human soul is capable of feeling pleasures and pains infinitely more poignant than any which on earth we are acquainted

with; and that it will feel such, there is the highest reason to believe. What then must be the value of that soul, which may enjoy the utmost happiness, or suffer the utmost misery? and “what shall a man give in exchange” for it?

But I should leave this subject very incomplete, if I neglected to mention that chief character of our souls, their immortality, which, as it most of all fixeth their worth, so is it the most universally known and certainly determined. Men who have thought it their interest to oppose this doctrine seem to have widely mistaken their object, by bending all their strength to shew that the soul is material, since we can conceive it as easy for God to make a body immortal as a spirit; so that whether the soul were material or immaterial, its immortality remains demonstrable by the following easy argument. We are placed in a world where all things proclaim the perfections of the Creator. The more we consider every part, the more we must admire how they answer the designs of Him
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who formed them. In the midst of so many productions, corresponding so well to their destination, we find one, which seems not to agree with that marvellous order conspicuous in the rest—that one is the human soul. As flame, air, æther, or by whatever idea we represent it, we cannot fail being struck with the apparent disproportion between its present state and that for which it plainly seems formed. We know, we feel (and proofs of sentiment are of all others the strongest) we feel that the soul is desirous of a felicity immense in its degree, and infinite in its duration. If any one should offer me a state of perfect happiness, to last for ten thousand years, and then to cease for ever, it is possible I might be tempted to accept it; but I should undoubtedly find it quite unsatisfactory. Ten thousand years are bounds too narrow for desires that overleap all barriers of time, and cannot be satisfied with less than eternity. Such is the soul: but where is it lodged? Here is the cause of astonishment. It is placed among objects inadequate to its
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vast desires; it is daily racked with the desire of seeing some new object, nearly as much as it is satisfied with what it has; and in all the range of sublunary pleasures, it finds only wherewith to make its condition tolerable and agreeable, but not perfectly happy. How shall we reconcile these things? How shall we make the Almighty's works agree? There is one certain way to remove all difficulties, to teach us whence we came, whither we go, and what we shall be. If God hath sent us into this world, it is not to dwell here for ever; if he hath lodged our souls in weak and perishable bodies, it is not to be buried in their ruins. Without this, what constitutes the proper dignity of man would be his greatest misery. Those eternal desires, that faculty of reflecting and wishing for perpetuity, which seem to raise man so far above the brutes, in reality would throw him beneath them. They enjoy their animated organs, without the smallest mixture of care; they have no desires to moderate, nor any craving which they cannot satisfy on the fields they inhabit.

inhabit. If the soul of man, therefore, is not immortal, he may justly envy the creeping insect and beast of the earth.

I repeat this argument, to shew the great advantage which we have over the unbeliever in this dispute; since, even according to his principles, though the idea he has formed of revelation were just, and though our souls were material, yet we ought to admit the doctrine of their immortality, as most conformable to all that we can observe of the Creator's designs.

But when one is convinced of that immortality, can any thing be added to enhance the value of the soul? or can any moral argument have greater influence on our lives? To enforce it there is no need of florid expression, bold figures, lively images, nor any one ornament of art. The most simple and natural expressions of this great motive are the most pathetic and striking. I know none of greater energy than that of St. Paul—"the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Although the
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entire world were the price to be given for our souls, and though the world were freed from those characters of vanity that are every where discernible, still there would be an amazing and absorbing disproportion between a world that must one day cease to be, and a soul that must exist for ever. The man, therefore, who knows to compare time with eternity, must know that there is nothing to be given in exchange for his soul.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVII.

P R O V. xi. 27.

HE THAT SEEKETH MISCHIEF, IT
SHALL COME UNTO HIM.

EVERY man has, both within himself and about him, peculiar sources of temptation. Within are his habits and passions; and around him are different objects and circumstances, which, to him, are occasions of sinning. It may be very well said of temptation, as St. Paul said of grace, that as there are diversities of gifts and inspirations, which all proceed from the same spirit of holiness, and work in us, though in various ways, for our conversion and salvation; so there are diversity of temptations, all raised by the same spirit of iniquity, to corrupt and destroy us.

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We cannot fail to know sufficiently the weak side on which he attacks us most frequently; and, heedless as we commonly are of our conduct, yet, with the smallest attention, we can easily distinguish, not only the temptation that most easily be-fets us, but also the circumstances that render it most powerful. What is a temptation to one, is not so to another; what is the occasion of one's falling, brings hardly any danger to another; and, we sometimes see, that a man will remain unshaken by the greatest scandals, whom yet a mere trifle, by some particular disposition, will be the cause of ruining. In such cases, therefore, our utmost caution is necessary: for, though we may sometimes be obliged to hazard our lives, yet it is never allowed us to hazard our salvation; and if we voluntarily expose ourselves to temptation, it is folly to expect the assistance of Heaven to support and preserve us. By what right, indeed, could the man who rashly, and contrary to the order of God, brings himself into danger; by what right could

could he hope for, or pray for, the victorious graces of the spirit? Not by right of justice, for they were no longer graces, if obliged to attend on every capricious desire of man; not by right of promise, because the Almighty has no where promised them; nor even of mercy, for of that his presumption has made him unworthy. On the contrary, he may be well assured that God will not afford him these helps; for there is no truth more clearly revealed in Scripture, than that God abandons the presumptuous sinner to the depravity of his desires.

In opposition to this, it is of no force to say that God is faithful, and that the faithfulness of God, according to St. Paul, consists in not suffering us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. That God is faithful, is an eternal truth; but, to preserve us from temptation above our strength and to supply us with supernatural strength when we plunge in temptations that might be avoided, are two things very different, and not in the least connected

nected with each other; for, without prejudice to his faithfulness, God may well refuse us what we have no reason to demand. He is faithful in his promises; but where hath he promised to assist in temptation, him, who seeks temptation? To reason justly, and according to the analogy of faith, we must reverse the proposition, and conclude in this manner—that because God is faithful, he will abandon in temptation the man who seeks it; because he has told us as expressly, that he who loves danger shall perish in it, and that “he who seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him,” as that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. Such conduct indeed seems necessary in the very nature of the thing. If zeal for God’s glory, any motive of charity, accident, or surprise, bring a man into temptation, he may with security depend upon the assistance of Heaven, which in such a case will never fail; but when he is brought into the snare by presumptive wilfulness, it is absurd to suppose he should
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be blest with those assisting graces, which were never designed for such conjunctures. If this were possible, the grace of God must become the foundation and pretence for the sinners temerity. The mercy of God, therefore, which extends over all his works, is yet in this case necessarily so managed as to cut off all ground for presumptuous confidence: for, if I knew that when I encounter temptations, even contrary to the will of God, I should nevertheless be infallibly supported, from that moment all circumspection and Christian prudence would become entirely useless; because I should be as strong and invincible in seeking occasions of sin as in avoiding them, and the grace of Heaven, instead of making me vigilant and humble, would make me careless and proud. Seeing mankind, therefore, possessed with an illusion so injurious to his holiness, the Almighty, in cases of presumption, deprives them of his grace; by this means justifying his providence from the reproach of authorizing rashness and libertinism. His stores of grace he keeps

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in reserve for the wise and prudent Christian, not for the blind and negligent; for souls who are moved with salutary fear, distrustful of their own strength, and watchful over their weakness; but not for the audacious and the headstrong, who rush on without reflection; them he delivers over to the desires of their heart, and the punishment, though terrible, is conformable to the nature of their crime: for, what is the crime of him who, inclined by some governing passion, flies not from temptation, but engageth it rashly? It is one of the greatest disorders that a creature can fall into; even a violation of that fundamental precept, which says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." In the language of Scripture we find that God may be tempted two ways: First, by demanding a miracle of him without necessity; this the Pharisees did, of whom St. Luke speaks, "Others, tempting him, sought a sign from Heaven:" and, Secondly, by pretending to practise dissimulation towards him; such was the sin of the Jews, when

when they enquired of Jesus whether they should pay tribute to Cæsar or not—"Hypocrites," said the saviour of the world to them, "why tempt ye me?" But the Christian who exposeth himself to temptation, presuming on the grace of God, is at once guilty of both these sins. It is plain that he asks of God a miracle without necessity: for he does nothing to preserve himself, and yet thinks that God will preserve him; he makes no use of the graces which he hath, and yet depends upon others which he hath not. The grace which he hath would assist him in flight, but he will not fly; the grace which he hath not would assist him in the combat, and therefore he braves the danger: in this manner reversing, or at least endeavouring to reverse, all the laws of Providence. The natural order requires that he should retire when he can; but this he will not do, and yet would have God, by extraordinary means, to preserve him from perishing. Is not this to demand a miracle, and a very useless one too?

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When God, designing to preserve Lot, the friend of Abraham, and his family, from the destruction of Sodom, sent him word to depart from that condemned city, if Lot had refused this condition, begged leave to stay in the city, and prayed that his house, in the midst of the conflagration, might be preserved from burning, how would such a prayer have been received? What reception could it deserve but to be rejected with scorn? Yet this is what we do every day. We would go in places where the flame of impurity is kindled on every hand, and require that God, by his special grace, should preserve us from harm; we would run where the darts of the enemy fly thick, and demand that God should cover us with his shield. But he knows how to reduce us to order, and confound our presumption. His command to us is the same as to Lot, "Thou shalt not stay in all the region;" get thee hence! There shall no miracle be wrought in favour of the obstinate; and the only hope of thy safety lies in a speedy flight.

Agreeable

Agreeable to this is the conduct recorded of our Lord in the gospel. He might have accepted the defiance that the tempter set him; he could have thrown himself from the battlements of the temple without the least danger; but he is content to oppose him with this quotation—"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:" by this giving us to understand, that the enemy of our salvation ought rather to be vanquished by the vigilance and fidelity of man, than by a miracle of the Almighty Power. It is this consideration that in all ages hath made good men so attentive, so timid, so reserved: but we, as if better instructed in the counsels of God, carry our confidence much farther. The spirit of deceit tells us, "Throw thyself down; fear nothing, but plunge boldly in the deep; for God has commissioned his angels for thy safeguard, and they shall keep thee in all thy ways." Thus he bids us, and we hearken to him; and we persuade ourselves that the angels of Heaven will indeed come to our assist-

ance, and that the divine grace will descend upon us: we shut our eyes, to march on with more assurance in the ways of danger; we hazard all, and put even the power of the Almighty to the proof; we would have him do for us what he did not do for his Son; we demand of him a miracle, which (if I may use the expression) he refused to himself.

Finally, we tempt God by our hypocrisy, when we implore his grace in a temptation from which we refuse to fly, and from which we even fear to be delivered. Well might he say to us, indeed, as our Lord to the Jews, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" For we ask him one thing with the mouth, while in the heart we wish for another. We pray that he would deliver us from temptation, and, contrary to his express command, we run into it ourselves. We say to him, "Lord, consider my weakness, and save me from the power and violence of the tempter;" and yet, by a monstrous contradiction, we become our own tempters: unnaturally we exercise

exercise this diabolic office upon ourselves, and are at once both the agent and the sufferer.

If then our guilt and absurdity is so great in depending upon the deliverance of Heaven in temptations of our own seeking, what must be the fatal consequences of this conduct? How must we fall from sin to sin! how must we sink still deeper and deeper, when deprived of those heavenly graces, without which we can do nothing! Should we, for example, propose to share some enjoyments with men of dissipated lives, and depend on the favour and grace of God to preserve us from their grosser degrees of wickedness, yet even this is destructive of the hopes of religion. If we bring but a relish for their pleasures, custom and example will soon make us proficient, and in a little we shall start with amazement to find ourselves lost in such excesses as we never once thought of before, unless with detestation. Nights of riot, and mornings of dull insipidity, will indispose us for thought and reflection; and the sense of

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religion,

religion, which lives and is nourished only by these, will gradually decay. The comforts of the innocent mind, which used before to warm us with delight; which used to bear us away in the rapturous contemplation of futurity, is now for ever fled! Distrust and apprehensions of jealousy have succeeded; and, to drive these away, recourse must be had to continual intemperance. Dreadful is the state, when a man must fly from his own thoughts, and from the presence of his own mind: the only hope he can have in such a state is in the extraordinary grace of God; but whether or not he deserves such grace, is a consideration, we have seen, which can afford him little comfort.

How much, therefore, does it concern us to watch over ourselves with all diligence; and, so far from loving danger or seeking mischief, to avoid the least appearance of evil! to observe what sins most easily beset us, whether from our constitution, or other circumstances; to study
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the very bent and tendency of our passions; and, by our observations on these, to regulate our conduct in governing ourselves, and in addressing the Father of Heaven for his assisting grace. On his assisting grace we may safely depend to carry us through all temptations which happen to us in the order of providence, that is, which we cannot avoid; but let us always remember, that even in this case our own concurrence is necessary: for the grace of God does not so work in us as to exclude our own care and industry. The work of the Spirit upon the hearts of the faithful is to actuate and inspire them; but to perform what is good is the business of him who is actuated and inspired. In this sense, therefore, the grace of God is a great argument for diligence and care; for if he furnisheth us with power, it behoves us to live like men who have not received this power in vain. Our danger is only from ourselves: we may, but no other creature under heaven can, defeat our hopes. Our presumption

tion or disobedience alone can rob us of the assistance of God. Let us be careful, therefore, and watchful over ourselves; and, whilst we have opportunity, work out our salvation.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVIII.

PROV. xxix. 5.

A MAN THAT FLATTERETH HIS
NEIGHBOUR, SPREADETH A NET FOR
HIS FEET.

THE weakness of the human heart
exposeth it to innumerable dangers.
Constant attention is necessary to preserve
it secure; because it is often assailed on
the most unsuspected side. If our minds
were as pure, and our hearts as firm, as
the perfection of our nature requires, we
should not be reduced to the sad necessity
of dreading, not only the errors and fol-
lies of mankind, but even their truth—
when it is agreeable and flattering. But
the conceit and vanity, which all men
have in some degree, renders truth itself
often

often dangerous. It is the prerogative of God alone to receive praise without danger. "Thou, O God, art praised: and to thee shall the vov be performed." He hears, and is pleased to hear, the endless hymns of his angels. He hears the voice of praise ascending from all nature: the infinite variety of beings celebrating him, according to their different powers, as the great, the just, the merciful God, wonderful in his counsels, and the only object of supreme love. He receives those truths without prejudice to his holiness; because, being in himself essentially holy and true, these attributes can never jar, nor harm each other.

It is far otherwise with us: unstable ourselves as water, our very virtues partake of this instability; whence ariseth the necessity, if we judge wisely, of our suspecting every thing that flatters us, because, according to the custom of the world, which we know but too well, there is nothing in general more seductive and deceitful; and of all delusions, there

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is none more shameful in the eyes of men, nor more pernicious in the sight of God, than that which, by the suggestions of self-love, makes us take falsehood for truth, and think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

The words of the prophet, addressed to the Jews, may be universally applied—My people, they who call you blessed deceive you—they who affect to praise, to applaud, to call you happy and perfect, these impose upon you, and abuse your credulity. In fact, what are applauses in the common style of the world? Obliging falsehoods; officious exaggerations; extravagant signs of apparent esteem, proceeding neither from reason nor from the heart; often disguised insinuations, covered with the veil of sincerity; specious and honourable terms, but signifying nothing; the offspring of vanity, and the deception of self-love; impostures, produced and authorized by false regard, by mean complaisance, or by servile interest. People tell us what we ought to be, rather than what
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we are : and we, by a pitiable blindness of running into the snare that is spread for us, believe ourselves to be indeed what adulation represents us. Flattering portraits are made of our persons; they are made pleasing, and we believe them natural: vast applauses are given to our talents, which are only compliments and figures, but we fail not to take them literally: praises are bestowed even on our vices and passions, and we do not hesitate to count them for virtues.

In this manner it often happens, that a man who is naturally modest, and who would be humble if he knew himself, intoxicated with this vain incense, thinks himself possessed of merits which he never possessed; thanks God for graces which God never gave him; acknowledgeth the reception of talents which he never received; ascribes to himself successes which he never had; and enjoys himself secretly, while he is openly despised. These are the ordinary consequences of our unhappy disposition to love
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and seek after flattery; having no person so charitable as to tell us that we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

Some learned men have very plausibly ascribed the origin of those idolatrous superstitions that prevailed so long in the world to this abuse of which I speak: to that inclination which men have of believing what is advantageous, however incredible it may really be. Certain men were told that they were gods; and, by often hearing this told them, they became accustomed to be honoured and treated as gods. Those who first held that language to them knew very well that it was false; yet, from a spirit of flattery, they performed every action that they would otherwise have done from a spirit of sincerity, had they been convinced that what they spoke was true. The princes even, and the conquerors, to whom those honours were paid, sufficiently knew their impropriety; but the desire of elevation, joined to political interest, made them at
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first endure, and afterwards demand them. It was, indeed, by the grossest error that the people submitted to pay them; yet that error, growing by little and little into an opinion, became insensibly a law of religion; and to those mortals temples were built, altars were consecrated, sacrifices were offered, and those profane and impious men passed for gods of the earth: the demon of flattery thus prevailing over the pride of the one, and the simplicity of the other.

We dare not say that this error is entirely destroyed even by Christianity: vestiges of it remain every where, and a species of idolatry is established by the custom of the world. We tell the rich and the great no more that they are gods, but we tell them that they are not as other men are; that they want those weaknesses which others have, and possess those qualities which others want: we separate them so from the rest of mankind, that, forgetting what they are, they think themselves gods; not considering that their admirers
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are interested persons, determined to please them, or rather determined to deceive them. Nor may we confine ourselves to the great and powerful ones of the world to justify this observation: the idolatry I speak of reigns equally in the lower conditions, and produceth there proportionable effects. Thus a woman is idolized by interested and designing men, till she knows herself no more; and, though marked with a thousand faults and imperfections, yet thinks of correcting none of them; believing herself a subject every way accomplished, the joy and admiration of the whole world, because such phrases are constantly employed for her seduction and ruin. Thus a false or a foolish friend, by habitual complaisance, becomes idolatrous of his friend; hiding from him the most salutary of all views, which is the view of himself; and leading his mind into as many errors as he says to him soft and agreeable things. What are, properly speaking, those public orations, where falsehood and flattery, under the colour of eloquence, triumph with impunity

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over truth? What are those public addressees, where, by the caprice of the author, the most obscure merits are exalted to the most shining; where the most indifferent virtue is considered as the most eminent and sublime; where there is no courtier who is not worthy of governing the state, no churchman who does not deserve the mitre? What are all those but a mercenary sacrifice of excessive praises to the infatuation of men. We know well that truth is the last thing we need look for in those performances; and yet, by the corruption of self-love, which can prevail over all, we easily imagine them to be partly true.

This disorder is carried yet much farther: it enters at times even into the holy place, which is transformed into a theatre of worldly flattery. Instead of discourses composed for the edification of the living, we sometimes hear laboured panegyrics, in which the preacher, by his own authority, undertakes to canonize the dead: panegyrics, in which the weakest are without discernment converted into heroes, the dullest

dullest minds into great geniuses, and sinners into saints. These are deplorable effects of the passion of vanity, so natural to men of the world.

The contradiction is, that in the midst of all this, those men, so vain and so passionate for glory, never cease to protest that the thing they abhor most is to be deceived; in the mean time they wish to be praised, flattered, and admired, as if flattery and delusion could possibly be separated. They love not deceit; but they love applause, which in its very nature is deceitful: whence it is evident, however strange it may seem, that mankind reckon it a high pleasure to be deceived by one another, and are mutually thankful for this extraordinary favour.

What resolution then can we take to avoid these errors? We must resolve to distrust even truth, when it seems to flatter us; because there is no appearance of truth which approacheth so near to falsehood, nor is so difficult to be distinguished from falsehood; and, consequently, there is

none so much exposed to the dangers of falsehood. To be the dupe of false applause, we know, is sufficient to make a man despised of all the world; and the most ridiculous character on earth is he who is blown up with the persuasion of imaginary worth. If however we had nothing but the world to fear, perhaps we might bring ourselves, by our very pride and vanity, to disregard its opinions. But how shall we answer to God, when he shall reproach us for seeking flattery, and encouraging deceit; for listening to the voice of this charmer, and living in perpetual error; for rolling ourselves in the smoke of this incense, to the exclusion of heavenly light? Shall we, like Adam, throw the blame upon others, and say that men have beguiled us? But will not God, the severe though equitable judge, discover that we have only been beguiled by our own vanity? Even considered with regard to the present perfection of our nature, the truth which flatters us is dangerous; as it encourageth a secret pride, and damps the ardor of our zeal. Better were

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it for us never to hear such truths ; better were they buried in silence and obscurity ; if they render us haughty towards our brethren, and forgetful of our God ! How many minds have been poisoned by the conceit of their own worth ! how many stars eclipsed by the dazzling reflection of their own light !

Jesus Christ himself, who, according to the Scripture, was the firm and immovable rock, to whom the praises of the universe were due, as the tribute of his supreme grandeur and adorable perfections ; yet while on earth would not suffer those truths which made for his honour and glory. He wrought wonders ; he cured the blind and deaf ; he raised the dead ; yet when the people began to celebrate his name for this, and to cry that he was the prophet of God, he enjoined them silence, and seemed upon the whole extremely impatient of applause. Even to the demons did he extend this modesty ; and when those spirits, forced by his omnipotent word, left the bodies they had possessed, exclaiming that he was the

Christ, he rebuked them, and suffered them not to proceed. Instead of receiving the homage which was offered to his power, he used his power to forbid and reject it. Was there any danger for *him* in being praised? Doubtless there was none: but there might have been for us; and because he came to be our pattern in all things, to supply the weakness of our nature by the sanctity of his example, he shunned worldly praise, that we might be instructed to dread those who, by flattering, deceive and destroy us: for, perfection being a work of constancy and difficulty, whose principal exercise consists in advancing, we must every day labour with care; and if we could intermit this toil with honour and safety, we would certainly do it with joy. But to this the immoderate praise of men infallibly leads us; for it makes us believe ourselves far advanced, and endangers an immediate recoil. St. Paul, confirmed as he was in grace, writes thus to his Philippians: “ Brethren, I count not myself to have attained perfection: but this I do; forgetting those

those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling." We observe a conduct very different, and very opposite to this of the apostle: we regard with peculiar satisfaction the little good we have already done, and almost entirely forget the great things which remain for us yet to do.

To avoid so fatal a blindness, let us fix this great maxim in our minds, that a flatterer is worse than a declared enemy, and that even truth must be distrusted, or at least not entertained with avidity, when it flatters us. Let us forget our good works—God is just, and will remember them; but let our sins be ever in our sight. The contemplation of our own merit may be pleasing, but it is dangerous; it leads to overweening pride, and careless self-sufficiency. Good deeds sanctify us, and wicked deeds corrupt us; but, by an effect quite contrary, the frequent remembrance of good works corrupts us, and nothing is so proper to sanctify us as the remembrance

of our sins: as if God, by a particular providence, had inclined to give this consolation to the sinner, that the sharp remembrance of his sin may be made its remedy; while the remembrance of his good deeds is a perpetual temptation to the just. But even this temptation serves a great end, as it obligeth us to constant watchfulness and constancy, to dread the tongue of the flatterer, to distrust our own merit, and to depend alone upon the God of eternal truth,

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S E R M O N XIX.

M A T T. x. 28.

FEAR NOT THEM WHO KILL THE BODY,
BUT ARE NOT ABLE TO KILL THE
SOUL; BUT RATHER FEAR HIM WHO
IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH SOUL
AND BODY.

THE term *fear*, in this passage of
Scripture, is taken to signify that
disposition of mind by which we regard
any being as capable of making us happy
or miserable. There is no being around
us but, by the wise dispensation of Provi-
dence, hath some power of favouring or
opposing our happiness. Whatever can
favour or annoy any member or motion of
our body, may advance or disturb the hap-
piness of our body; whatever can brighten
or

or obscure any idea of our mind, may contribute to our mental happiness or misery; and whatever can procure us any pleasant or painful sensation, may contribute to make us particularly happy or miserable. But it happens often, that some particular happiness, considered with regard to our general felicity, is a real misfortune; and that some particular misfortune, in the whole, of our happiness, is a real good. Thus, in the life of a man, it is a particular misfortune to lose an arm, or any other limb; but, considered in a general view, it becomes a real good, if the preservation of that limb would have infallibly brought on his death. Thus it is a particular misfortune for a saint to suffer martyrdom; but, considered in a general view, it is the highest felicity; because, by the pains of a few moments, he escapes those that are endless, and obtains an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

To regard, then, a Being as having the power of bestowing happiness or misery, in this general sense, is *to fear Him;*

Him; and the term is used precisely in the same acceptation in different places of the sacred Scripture. So, in the prophecies of Isaiah, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread, and he shall be for a sanctuary:" and in another place, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man who shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy maker?" So in the Gospel, "Fear not them who kill the body; but rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body." And so in that beautiful passage of the prophet Jeremiah, where he would vilify the false deities of his time in the eyes of the Jews, and exhort them to adore the true God of the universe—"The gods," says he, "that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from off the earth and from under these heavens: be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good; for there is none like thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name

name is great in might; who would not fear thee, O King of nations?" Fear, therefore, taken in this sense, is an homage which cannot be paid to any creature without idolatry; for to regard any creature as capable of determining the happiness or misery of an immortal soul, is plainly to pay it the honours of adoration: but to God alone this homage belongs, in a complete and eminent manner, because he possesseth, without restriction, every cause and source of happiness or misery.

In our contemplations of the Supreme Being, we must necessarily consider him as absolutely independent, and, consequently, possessing a will of itself efficacious; that is to say, that all his acts of volition are infallibly succeeded by their effects; and this distinguisheth the Deity essentially from every other possible existence. All spirits, it is true, have a will which is efficacious in a certain degree and manner; but this efficacy is both borrowed and limited. It is limited, and in the spirits of men very narrowly, extending not beyond the circumference

cumference of the human body: and it is borrowed; for though I can resolve to move my arm, and the motion will immediately follow that act of my mind, yet if it shall please God, who gave me this power, to take it away, by altering the internal mechanism of my arm, or by any other means, I shall then have no more power over that limb than I have over the matter which constitutes the body of the sun. But the will of the Eternal Spirit, as it is independent, so it is boundless, commanding things present and things to come, and embracing the whole circle of beings actual and possible. Our low and narrow minds, low and narrow as they are, have yet an idea of the great and marvellous; which idea we find, upon examination, to be boundless: when we give it scope, it carries us beyond all that we see, and beyond all that exists; the whole creation appears too small; it flies out into the immense void, and, quitting the material world, we are transported into a world of imagination. Hence those fabulous narrations,

rations, those enchantments, and amazing adventures that we have read of. A man is, doubtless, very despicable who employs his time on such incoherent tales; but yet the principle which gave rise to them ought to render the human mind respectable. God himself is the original of those boundless ideas; for in him alone our idea of the great and marvellous is absorbed. The extravagance of fable consists not so much in having imagined those things, as in having misplaced them. Let us, for example, suppose some sumptuous palace or splendid city rising from the ground at once like an exhalation; in God we may find the reality of this idea: we may see him calling up, not one palace or city, but the whole world, from nothing; fixing the sun in his place, arranging the planets around him, and sowing the heavens with stars thick as a field. "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and they were created." Who would not fear thee, O King of nature! for to thee alone it appertaineth to be feared. From thee

thee all the creatures came, and by thee they subsist; one act of thy almighty will gave them being, and one act of the same will can take it from them: the most formidable beings on earth can only be feared for some small portion of efficacy which thou lendest them; but thou thyself art the source of eternal and absolute power!

But why need we climb so high to find an object suitable to the fear of man? Man who is only a vapour, which a blast can dispel; man who is only a flower, which the wind can wither. That is incontestible, indeed, with regard to the outward and visible part of man, in which we too often place all our glory: but we shall have very different thoughts while we contemplate his more noble part, the soul; for then we shall perceive that God alone has supreme dominion over the operations of an immortal spirit: whence we must conclude, that he alone has in his hands the happiness or misery of man, and that therefore he alone deserves the homage of fear—"Fear not them who kill the body, but

but are not able to kill the soul." The greatest tyrant that ever breathed cannot act immediately upon a human soul: it is only by the intervention of the body that he can give it pain; and when he increaseth this pain to a certain degree of violence, he breaks the tie which connects the soul to the body, and sets the former free from his chains by thinking to overload it. The soul is then utterly beyond his reach: it is not visible to be frightened by his frown; it is not extended to be shut up in his dungeon; it is not palpable to be loaded with his fetters; it is not divisible to be mangled on his wheel; nor combustible to be burnt at his stake. His power only extends over a small portion of matter: but the soul of man is above all matter; it is not to be subdued by space or extension.

But if the soul, considered in this view, can brave all violence and cruelty, what submission, what humility, what fear ought it to have for the Father of spirits, who can act upon it directly and immediately? He needs not the odour of flowers, nor the
favour

favour of meats, nor any other assistance of matter, to procure it agreeable sensations: he needs not the help of chains nor dungeons, sulphur, fire, nor suffocating steams, to afflict it with pain. It is he, soul of man! who can leave thee to wander in thy natural darkness, a prey to all the tortures that accompany doubt, uncertainty, and ignorance; but it is he also who can at his pleasure advance thy understanding to the highest perfection. It is he who can strike the tyrant with unutterable horror in the midst of all his pomp and pleasures, "till his countenance be changed, and his thoughts troubled; till the joints of his loins are loosed, and his knees smite one against another;" but it is he also who, in the midst of the martyr's torments, can divert all feeling, or absorb every sensation of pain in stronger ones of pleasure. It is he who can excite in the soul those ineffable delights for which we have no name, and of which we have no idea; but which shall be the subject of our eternal praises, if they are now the object

of our desires. It is God alone who can do all these; they are beyond the strength of man.

The character which we have of immortality sets us above the reach of mortal power. Language fails us to express the shortness of human life, when compared with our endless duration: it is but a span, an hair-breadth, a point. Whatever persecutions a man may suffer, they can follow him no farther than the grave; for there the servant is freed from his master, and there the weary are at rest: the cruelty, therefore, of his persecutor is unworthy of fear, because it is impotent and vain; it is the shooting of a dart against the lightning as it flies from the east to the west athwart the sky. Here again the immortal King appears the proper object of fear: earthly dominion must fall to decay, and earthly power must have an end; but he is the same for ever, and his years shall never fail: eternally shall his empire last over the souls of men, either for happiness

or misery. It is now the object of our faith, and

or misery; eternally shall the reprobate soul be the object of his vengeance; and eternally shall the faithful soul be the object of his benignity.

If aught more is needful to magnify the power of God, the Scripture teacheth us that all the powers of nature, animate and inanimate, concur invariably in his designs: this, indeed, is no more than a consequence of his efficacious will. He raiseth up tyrants and persecutors, who, while they dream of pursuing their own ends, and exalting their own glory, are only the scourges of his wrath for the punishment of the disobedient. Thus the prophet Isaiah exclaims, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation: I will send him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets: howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few." It is the

same with inanimate beings—"When he uttereth his voice," says Jeremiah, "there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with the rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures." What can human force do against those insurrections of the elements? Can it still the noise of the waters, or calm the foaming waves, when they roll on high and mix with the clouds? Can it dissipate the lightning, bind the winds in their treasures, or silence the terrible thunder? How little is man, compared with these messengers of God! and who would not fear the eternal King of nations?

It is thus the prophets represent all the creatures concurring in the views of the Creator: and this is no doctrine for which we need the submission of faith; for it is dictated by reason, and confirmed by experience. We see a cherub with a flaming sword to guard the entrance of the interdicted paradise; the air disturbed, the earth

earth loaded with noxious productions, and the animals rendered savage, to punish the sin of man; the waters changed into blood, and light into darkness, to distress the stubborn Pharaoh; the earth swallowing up the schismatic Dathan; fire devouring the sacrilegious Abihu; the very stars in their courses fighting against Sisera, while the river Kishon sweeps away his hosts.

But, on the contrary, when God declares himself for a people, the whole universe conspires to make them happy; the sky sheds forth its beauties; the sun diffuseth his chearing beams; the earth, enamelled with flowers, and covered with fruits, serves to bless those favourites of Heaven; the animals are docible in their service; “all things work together for good to them that love God.”

The instruction which these reflections afford is this, that to regard any creature as the cause of man's felicity, is to pay that creature the homage of adoration, and to be guilty of idolatry. This is the crime of the miser, of the ambitious, of the volup-

tuous. But it is also idolatry to pay to any creature the homage of fear; for fear is no less due to God alone than hope or trust. He who fears the ravages of war, and fears not the God who raiseth up wars in the earth, is an idolater; he who fears a pestilence, and fears not the God who sends the pestilence, is likewise an idolater. It is also, if not idolatry, yet at least a species of weakness, when we fear God, to fear any other subaltern divinities. Wars, plagues, famines, seditions, misfortunes, diseases, and death, are only the ministers of that God whose favourite creatures we are. When they execute their office, though the sentence may alarm us, yet we ought not to be dismayed, because it is inflicted only for our advantage. Let the peace we enjoy be troubled, if our heavenly Father sees it will prove fatal to us; let the prosperities which we glory in be removed away, if he perceives them to be dangerous; let our dearest connections be broken, if they are impediments in our Christian course; let death cut us off from this earth,

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if he can conduct us to the regions of rest and peace.—Let our minds be stored with these thoughts, and our hearts armed with confidence: let us fear God, and have no other fear; for that is the character of a hero and a Christian.

S E R M O N XX.

FOR CHRISTMAS.

LUKE, ii. 14.

ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TO-
WARDS MEN.

“**T**O us a child is born!” said the enraptured prophet: “to us a son is given; and his name shall be called the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!” On this day we commemorate the accomplishment of this great prophecy: we celebrate with sacred joy and thanksgiving the remembrance of that awful night in which the Ancient of Days appeared as a child. The mysterious time was at length arrived; the sceptre was departed from Judah, and the Star of Jacob shewed himself to the world. To
honour

honour his appearance, the heavenly hosts attune their harps to new strains of melody: occasions they had seen innumerable to sing forth the wonders of the Omnipotent; but here was a wonder surpassing all others, and demanding a more sweet and lively chorus: "Glory to God," was the subject of their song, with "peace on earth, and good will towards men."—To bring peace to the world was the express design of the Messiah's birth; and, by the wise disposition of Providence, all nature seemed to concur in this design. Universal peace reigned on the earth at that time. All the nations, subdued by the conquering arms of Rome, bore peaceably the yoke of that proud empress of the world. Rome herself, after the intestine broils which had depopulated her walls, and deluged Europe and Asia with the blood of her citizens, now breathed from the horror of these tumults, and, reduced under the government of a Cæsar, found in fancied slavery that peace and repose, which in her boasted freedom she could never find.—Thus peaceful was
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the universe: but it was a deceitful peace. The moral world was still the scene of the cruelest jars and diffensions. The heart of man, distracted by the multiplicity and contrariety of its ungoverned inclinations, could find no rest; because for this it sought the very source of its trouble and disquiet. The philosophers vaunted their power of bestowing peace on their disciples; and their maxims, enforced with powerful declamation, might no doubt at times restrain the sallies of passion, but they could not calm nor purify the heart. The peace they gave was but the child of pride and ostentation; it bore a fair outside of ease and serenity, while the poison still remained and rankled within.

The Messiah on this day appeared on the earth, to bring mankind that real and solid peace, which the world till then could not bestow. He brought a remedy for the cause of the disorder. His divine philosophy contents not itself with some shining aphorisms, which please the imagination by their glare, though they reach

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not the heart. He perceived the great enemies of human peace, ambition, hatred, and vengeance; and against these, at his very birth, he began to wage war.

Ambition is the first and great cause of those troubles that tear and destroy the peace of the world. What tumult, what rage, what fury, has not this fatal passion raised on the earth? What torrents of blood has it not shed? What is the history of empires and kingdoms, of princes and conquerors; what is the history of all ages, and all nations, but a sad tale of the calamities with which ambition hath from the beginning afflicted mankind? The whole world seemed only one gloomy scene, on which this frantic passion exhibited daily spectacles of slaughter and desolation. The desire of elevation passed for a glorious virtue; and moderation, for cowardice. A man overturned his country, trampled on its laws and customs, rendered millions of his fellow-creatures miserable, to reach the place of highest dignity: such a man for the success of his wickedness was praised and applauded;

plauded; his name, though stained with the blood of his brethren, was consigned to endless fame, with titles of greatness and excellency; and such a fortunate villain became the greatest man of his age. From examples like this the passion spread abroad, and descended even to the crowd; where, though its appearance was less striking, yet its rage was no less furious. The mean man was not more content than the noble; but every one strove to rise above another. The orator, the philosopher, disputed and declaimed: vain-glory was the phantom they pursued, and the cause of all their painful vigils; and, as the desires of ambition are insatiable, and it was then reckoned honourable to satisfy these desires, no wonder that peace was so rarely to be found, since what was the source of human glory, was also the destroyer of human peace.

The birth of Jesus Christ, by rectifying this great error of the world, re-established that peace which ambition had banished. He could have manifested himself to men, by fulfilling the most magnificent prophecies

cies in the literal sense. He could have taken the pompous titles of conqueror of Judah, of lawgiver to the people, of the deliverer of Israel: Jerusalem, at these glorious characters, would have acknowledged the Messiah she expected; but Jerusalem in these titles had regard only to human glory, and the Lord Jesus came to undeceive her, and to teach her that such glory is nothing; that such an appearance would not have deserved so many prophets to foretel it; that the sacred Spirit who inspired them, could only promise eternal glories to men; and that all other glories, far from increasing their happiness, only increase their miseries and crimes.

Thus he was born at Bethlehem, in a poor and abject state: without ceremony or attendance, he whose nativity was then celebrated by all the winged squadrons of heaven: without title to distinguish him in the eyes of men, he who was raised above all principalities and powers. He whose name is above every name, suffered himself to be written among the obscurest
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of the subjects of Cæsar. Poor simple shepherds came to pay him homage, to whom all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, bow down and obey. Whatever could serve to confound human pride is united in this first scene of his birth.

If titles, if elevation, if temporal prosperities, could infallibly bring happiness to the human breast, the Saviour of the world would no doubt have chosen these for himself, and also bestowed them on his followers: but he teacheth us to find peace by despising these; he teacheth us to find happiness rather by suppressing, than by satisfying our desires: he shews us far other glories than those of this world, and which this world can neither give nor take away.

Yet where is this sacred peace to be found? and who enjoys it? Are troubles, and fury, and rage, less frequent on the earth since the birth of the Messiah? Is there less dissension in states, and less discord among individuals? In cities, and other public

public scenes, ambition rages still: there every one strives to rise higher than his neighbour; and for one that obtains his wish, a thousand fail in the attempt, and make themselves miserable. Even in domestic scenes, where peace and quiet might be supposed to dwell, even these are haunted by disquiet, and vexation, and care; while the father of the family is more anxious for the worldly advancement of his children than for their Christian education, and by this conduct leaves them the sad inheritance of those very troubles that imbitter his own life.

The existence of these calamities is the fault of the patient, and not of the physician: our Lord has prescribed us good remedies, but we disdain to apply them. Unconscious even of our disease, till it becomes incurable, we tread the same paths that millions before us have trod, and wonder to find the same pains and disappointments that they have found.

The birth of Jesus Christ affords us another great lesson, and attacks another great

great enemy of our peace. By reconciling mankind to his Father, he unites in one body the Jew and the Gentile: he overthrows the hateful distinctions of Greek and Barbarian, of Roman and Scythian: he extinguisheth all feuds and hatreds; and of all the nations makes one great family, by giving to his disciples one heart and one mind. Before this they were bound by no common tye: they had no common hope to allay the flames of resentment; till by the new covenant they were taught, in the person of an enemy, to find a brother. The diversities of religion, of country, of language, of manners, of interests, had almost created a diversity even of nature: hardly could they regard each other as beings of the same kind; and hardly would they acknowledge their common humanity. They destroyed each other like savage beasts; gloried in the extermination of their fellow-creatures; and bore their bloody heads in triumph as trophies of their victory: as if they had at first proceeded from two jarring principles

ciples of life, who had placed them here below, only to avenge their mutual animosity.

But the Lord Jesus is become our peace and our reconciliation; the chief corner stone which connects the whole edifice; the vivifying head, which unites all his members in one mystical body. By every sacred and endearing connection we are now bound all to one another, and all to him. From the same common origin we came, and to the same common end we go: the same spirit animates us; the same hope supports us; and the same good shepherd leads us: we are heirs of the same glorious promises, and citizens of the same eternal kingdom. Yet what is the effect of these great bonds of fellowship? Christianity, which ought to be the union of hearts to all the faithful; Christianity, which ought to give a representation of the peace of Heaven here on earth; Christianity itself is only the scene of dissensions and troubles. Even religion, which should unite us in harmonious agreement, is made the cause of the most hor-

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rible discord. The enemies of the Christian name, the children of that false prophet who over-ran the eastern world with war and carnage, those are at peace among themselves; and we, the sons of peace, and the disciples of him who brought peace to the earth, have nothing in our hands but fire and sword. Kings rise against kings, and people against people: a barren rock and a heap of stones stir up their vengeance and fury; and nations are buried beneath its walls disputing to whom its ruins shall belong.

Nor is the prospect more pleasing even in private life. By the same laws we are protected, and by the same roof we are covered; yet by the same affections we are not governed. Townsfolk, as well as nations, are divided by jealousy: animosities are perpetuated between families, and transmitted from one generation to another, like an inheritance of malediction. In vain the authority of the legislature disarms the hand; it cannot disarm the heart: the dagger may be wrested from the
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man of vengeance; but with his tongue he can stab his enemy a thousand times more cruelly; and his hatred, obliged to lurk within his breast, becomes, from its confinement, a thousand times more poisonous. Was the birth of the Messiah then in vain! He came to bring peace on the earth; he left it to us, as our dearest heritage; he commanded us earnestly to love one another: yet peace and love seem well nigh banished from among us. Hatred and discord extend wide their empire; and that religion which tells us that even our enemies are our brethren is no more regarded; and the threatenings of God against the unforgiving spirit can move us no more.

Yet surely on a day like this, such black and turbulent dispositions ought to find no place in our souls. What man can have offended us so heinously that we may not this day forgive him? What headstrong passion can so possess our hearts, that we may not worthily join, at least as far as humanity can be worthy to join, with the choirs of angels, and sing forth “Glory to the

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Father of Heaven, and peace to the sons of men?" Is this peace a thing of so small value, as to demand no effort to obtain it? or do we conceive it impossible to be obtained? But it cannot be so: it is not impossible; it is not even difficult. Is it difficult to restrain those passions that are rough and turbulent, and to indulge the mild, the soft, the social affections? What difficulty can we find with so noble an example before us? an example of the lowest humility, the completest resignation, and the most extensive charity. What difficulty can we find, when we think what is due to him in gratitude for his incomprehensible love, and what imitation does this love call for at our hands?—Let us think what exalted dispositions besit the celebration of this festival! and what purity of heart is necessary to refine and sanctify our joy! With what pomp do the children of this world (wise, and also magnificent, in their generation) with what pomp do they celebrate the marches of their princes! The ways are bestrown with flowers, triumphal arches are raised, and
strains

strains of joy resound on every side. Let us, too, prepare the way of the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. Let us come, miserable sinners, loaded with the burthen of our crimes; consciences troubled with the remembrance of useless, or of pernicious deeds; feeble mortals, beaten by the storm of the tempest, distressed by the infirmities of nature and the follies of the world, condemned to the vicissitudes of fortune, and the horrors of death; let us come in order to find the cure of our woes, and the assurance of our peace. Let us celebrate the praises of the counsellor, the wonderful, the mighty God, the everlasting King, the Prince of Peace. "Thou art fairer than the children of men, because God hath blessed thee for ever: and in the day of thy power shall the people offer thee free-will offerings, with an holy worship." Reign over all, thou peaceful King! Reign over thine enemies: forgive their madness, and turn their stubborn hearts! But reign also over thy friends! reign over us! Gather us all at last, when thou comest with

thy heavenly hosts, in all thy awful glory. Let not those clouds that shall then serve for thy car of triumph, and those angels that in myriads shall hover around thee—let not those objects strike us with terror; let them charm and rejoice us: that, instead of trembling at thy approach, we may advance with alacrity to meet thee, and receive from thy hand our portion of glory, and our possession of eternal peace!

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S E R M O N XXI.

FOR GOOD-FRIDAY.

JOHN, iii, 19.

MEN LOVED DARKNESS RATHER THAN
LIGHT, BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS WERE
EVIL.

A SPIRIT of opposition to the truth has often been the general character of the world. Mankind wish to enjoy their errors and crimes in tranquillity; and, as that false tranquillity cannot be preserved but by voluntary blindness, every ray of light which discovers the truth to their eyes becomes offensive and insupportable. For this cause it is that the just men and prophets, whom God of his mercy raised up from age to age on the

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earth,

earth, were always hateful to men, and persecuted by the world, whose maxims they condemned. Thus Elijah was forced to fly from the rage of an idolatrous court, and the most inaccessible mountains could hardly afford him security: Ifaiah saw all Jerusalem conspire his destruction, foolishly thinking to extinguish in his blood that light of truth which dies not with them who die for it: Jeremiah found no better treatment from his countrymen; chains and prisons were the rewards of his instruction; and thus the world hath always risen against those who endeavoured to trouble the peaceable possession of its errors.

The most illustrious example of this is presented by the church to our meditation at this season, in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. In tracing the history of this great event, we may perceive the workings and effects of different passions, in the conduct of the priests, of the people, and of the judges; where the light of the world itself is obscured by the voluntary
blindness

blindness of envy, of inconstancy, of ambition, and of impiety.

“ Search the Scriptures,” said our Lord to the Jewish doctors, “ for they are they which testify of me.” If they put this advice in practice, they did it not with an honest and good heart: for the sceptre of Judah being now in the hand of a stranger, they must of necessity have concluded that the appointed time was come, that the desire of all nations was then in the world; and the miracles which were daily performed in their view, could leave them no place for doubt, with regard to the person, being exactly the same of which Isaiah and the other prophets had spoken: yet their envy threw a mist before their eyes, which darkened all the brightness of this evidence. The great reputation of Jesus, and his zeal against hypocrisy, had raised such emotions of jealousy and hatred in their hearts, as denied all entrance to the truth; and the more the splendor of his holiness shone forth, the more their clouds of passion lowered and blackened their gloom:

gloom: they perceived themselves sensibly decreasing in the esteem of the people; they met together to consult upon means for the prevention of this; but the mutual communication of their sentiments only served to increase their chagrin. The truth of his works they could not deny; but they obstinately persisted in opposing their evidence. “What shall we do?” said they, “for this man doth many miracles.” From a dispassionate and unprejudiced mind, the natural answer to this would have been, that because he did many miracles, he ought to be believed on; but how different was their resolution! “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him;” and, therefore, “from that day forth they took counsel to put him to death.”

We see here, that the first effect of envy is unbelief; we refuse our public assent to actions which we are forced to believe in secret, when the actors, upon account of their parts or elevation, are objects of our envy: if we cannot misrepresent their virtues, and turn them into vices, at least we endeavour

endeavour to set them in the worst light: whatever they have truly valuable, our jealousy makes us despise; and we rejoice to turn the public opinion against them, though in our conscience we are forced to approve their conduct. We may deceive others, but cannot deceive ourselves, and therefore the pleasure that such deceit yields must be always imperfect.

The chief priests and pharisees proceeded to seek false witnesses against Jesus, and found none. If they had sought for true witnesses, the whole world would have answered them; the people would exclaim, *that God never gave such power to man*; the dead revived, and the dying cured, would have declared him the *resurrection and the life*; yet they are blind to all this light, and driven by their passion to practise the lowest chicanery. This presents to our view a second character of envy; the ways it takes to blacken are always grovelling, dark, and mean. Of other passions men make their boast, but not of this: the ambitious man prides himself in
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his hopes and pretensions; the revengeful glories in his resentment; the voluptuous vaunts of his excess and revelry: but envy wishes always to lurk in darkness; it is the passion of mean souls; it is a tacit acknowledgment of one's own meanness; it is capable of every thing, for it can be the unprovoked enemy of merit and of innocence.

The enemies of our Lord, advancing in their malice, deliver him up to the insolence and fury of their slaves; and envy, which is always cruel, makes them behold, with inhuman pleasure, the indignities and disgraces, the insults and torments, with which he is loaded. Weak are the feelings of humanity in that soul, who, after having regarded the prosperity of his brother with discontent and pain, can see his distresses with satisfaction and delight: yet this is the next character of envy; it drives every piteous and tender sentiment from the breast; it beholds with secret joy the fall and misfortunes of its brethren; and is indeed made happy only by
other

other men's ruin: it is the passion of a bad heart, and renders useless every advantage which a man can possess. So Haman spoke to his friends " of the glory of his riches, " and the multitude of his children, and " all the things wherein the king (Aha- " fuerus) had promoted him: yet," said he, " all this availeth me nothing, so long as " I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the " king's gate."

To the gratification of this passion men will sacrifice the dearest interest. This we see exemplified in the conduct of the Jews—" We have no king," cried they, " but Cæsar." They who boasted before of *having never been in bondage to any man*; who detested the yoke of the uncircumcised; who had the advantage of being God's peculiar people, and of having the Lord for their father and their God; they sacrificed this glory and these advantages, which distinguished them from all other people; they renounced the hope of Israel, and the promises made to their fathers, to the cruel pleasure of seeing an innocent man perish,

perish, whose growing reputation they could not bear.

So great was the blindness and opposition to the truth of the Jewish rulers, proceeding from envy: it is equally conspicuous in the conduct of the people, proceeding from inconstancy and ingratitude. Those men who had been witnesses of so many wonders wrought by the Saviour of the world; they who followed him in crowds with his disciples; they who made the air resound with acclamations and Halleluiah's, and strewed the ground with olive branches, as trophies to this pacific king; these very men now persecute him as a mover of sedition, and cry to have him crucified. What ingratitude! what inconstancy! In the desert they wanted to make him a king by force, when he fed them with miraculous bread; and in the midst of Jerusalem they will not know him, nor have this man to reign over them!

It is ingratitude which is the cause of all our wanderings from the ways of God. Sometimes, moved with his grace and the
singular

singular benefits he bestows upon us, we have resolved to deliver up our hearts to him, and make him Lord of our affections: for some time, perhaps, we have followed him, animated by the grateful remembrance of his bounty. But soon the world and our own weakness have worn those traces from our memory: we have forgotten his kindness and our own vows; and, observing no bounds in our revolt, perhaps have openly declared against him, and endeavoured to extinguish our former sentiments of virtue, by superior audacity in wickedness. This is, indeed, the greatest obstacle to our progress in virtue; for virtue demands a constant and uniform life. If to be holy there was no more needful than one generous step, one heroic action, few men would complain of the difficulty: but the matter of hardship is, that when one sacrifice is made, another soon becomes necessary; when one passion is vanquished, another immediately springs up, demanding new efforts and fresh resolution. St. Peter, at first, could boldly draw his sword to defend

send his Lord from insults; but afterwards, upon the renewal of temptation, his courage failed him, and he fell. It is easy, at certain times, to be brave and generous; but the proof of our virtue is constancy and fidelity.

The next opposition to the truth, which this history shews us, appears in the conduct of Pilate, and proceeds from ambition. When the Saviour of the world is brought before this magistrate, every thing conspires to prove his innocence: Pilate even declares that he finds in him nothing worthy of death, and therefore resolves to let him go; but at the name of Cæsar his resolution is quickly changed—"If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." At this threatening insinuation he is greatly troubled. He was conscious of our Lord's innocence, and consequently knew it was his duty to acquit him at all hazards, for he was invested with sufficient power (as he declares himself); but, on the other hand, he feared an insurrection in Jerusalem, which might displease the emperor, and bring on his disgrace:

grace: he therefore casts about for some expedient to save Jesus; he takes advantage of the circumstance of time, and proposes to release him, according to his custom, at the feast; by thus insinuating, though it must have been against the conviction of his conscience, that Jesus was a criminal, and had need of pardon. Such is the effect of ambition upon the human heart: it makes us false and cowardly, when the interests of truth and justice demand our aid. Fearful of offending our superiors, we wish to soften and accommodate every thing: we are incapable of candour, of impartiality, of that nobleness of mind which the love of equity alone inspires; we can set up Jesus and Barabbas, and be ready to sacrifice either of the twain, as the voice of the people shall determine. Thus there is nothing to be depended on from a man whom ambition governs: he is without principle or feeling; he takes every form, and bends himself obsequiously to the opinion of others; he is continually asking, like Pilate, which of the two will you

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choose;

choose; and, as the wind turns, he supports justice or protects villany. Falsely has it been said, that ambition is the passion of great souls; for, a man is made truly great only by his love to truth.

To the same principle we must ascribe the conduct of Pilate in sending our Lord to Herod: for by this he meant not to save an innocent man; it was only a stroke of policy to regain the friendship of Herod.

At the tribunal of Herod, the truth received yet another opposition, which was that of impiety. This prince must have known himself for an usurper: he could not fail to know also the terrors of his predecessor, with regard to this new king of the Jews; but truth is always regarded by impiety as credulity and superstition. Herod, we are told by the evangelist, had been desirous to see Jesus of a long season; and he now hoped to have seen some miracle done by him: he expected no instructions, but only wanted some strange sight: he questioned him in many things, but it was not to discover the truth; it was only to make sport,

sport, and confirm himself in his infidelity. Being disappointed in his hope by the silence and modesty of Jesus, he set him at nought with his men of war, and returned him again to Pilate in mock triumph. Such are the ordinary steps of impiety. The infidel cries for the evidence of miracles, and despiseth the greatest of all miracles, the reception of the gospel and the preservation of the church: he proposeth vain questions, but it is with no view of receiving instruction; it is only to raise difficulties in the common faith of men: he talks much of the beauty of virtue and the purity of religion, though of these he himself hath little or none: he makes scorn of the modesty and humility of good men, regarding them as mean and little spirits, incapable of pursuing the brilliant routes of vice: he boasts how much he differs from them, believing himself born for greater things than to serve God, to save his soul, and gain the kingdom of heaven. By such absurdities the Almighty punisheth the pride

of men, leaving them to wander in their own darkness.

These are the striking examples of the power of passion and prejudice, which the gospel of this season affords. We see how far envy, inconstancy, ambition, and impiety, can make men blind to merit, forgetful of favours, regardless of innocence, and deaf to the voice of God; how far evil deeds can obscure the greatest light. The doctrine of the holy Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the priests, his humiliation disgusted the inconstancy of the people, his preservation would have hurt the ambition of Pilate, and his deportment condemned the impiety of Herod: these, therefore, all conspire together to take away his life, and to extinguish this light of the world, that they might enjoy their beloved darkness. Let these examples teach us to watch over our hearts, and preserve them pure. Every man has some ruling passion, which it is his duty to study and to regulate: by no other means can we preserve
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our souls free from prejudice and open to truth; nor can they otherwise be proper receptacles for the assisting graces which our Saviour died to purchase for us.

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S E R M O N XXII.

I COR. xiii. 9.

WE KNOW IN PART.

TH E R E are certain bounds set to man's knowledge, beyond which it cannot pass. As it is derived from a superior intelligent cause, the capacity and means of attaining it are limited to the particular purposes for which he hath designed them: yet are they formed, with the nicest precision, to answer every end for which our constitution is adapted. The wise Author of our intellectual powers has given us such a knowledge of corporeal beings, as may render them useful to us in life; and he hath given us such a capacity of knowing himself, and of knowing

knowing ourselves, as may direct us to act the part assigned us in the universal system, and attain our proper perfection and happiness: but, in their present state, our understandings are not fitted for a full comprehension of the least of God's works, far less of himself. In cases without number, indeed, in the whole extent of being, our knowledge is but partial: a little we understand; but a great deal is hid from our view. It is unjust, therefore, to argue against the belief or study of any principle, that it is dark and incomprehensible: and yet there is nothing more common in the mouth of the sceptic than this cavil; "Why these mysteries? why this darkness? Is not the boundless goodness of God concerned to remove this stumbling-block; to give us a religion which is every way luminous, and which no cloud obscures?" By this it is insinuated, that we artfully represent the objects of belief as abstruse and mysterious, to make them appear venerable; which, to inquisitive and con-

scious minds, is rather a prejudice against them.

But, to be satisfied concerning this, the best method is to look into the extent of our knowledge upon common subjects; and then to view the dignity of those subjects, which, in religion, are termed mysterious: if, from this view, those appear obviously too high for our understandings, there is then no cause of objection against their reality, or importance; nor, consequently, against our inquiring into, and believing, what may be known concerning them.

As to the extent of our knowledge upon common subjects, every man of sense is conscious of its narrowness: and this consciousness always increaseth in proportion as the circle of his knowledge is extended. The simplest object is big with difficulties that bids defiance to all penetration. What can be simpler, in appearance, than this proposition—that there exist without us objects, which make impressions upon our minds? Yet what mystery is more dark
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and difficult to explain, than the manner of this impression? or what mystery has given rise to so many idle disquisitions, and brought forth so many volumes of unintelligible jargon?—I mention this only to shew, that if the human understanding is so baffled in its attempts to explain the nature of created beings, whose existence and properties are most familiar to us, we ought not to think it strange that the knowledge of the uncreated essence is too high for us.

The questions on which Revelation has left any thing of obscurity, are not simple principles, such as might be comprehended at one view: they are of the most complex and intricate nature. To have instructed us fully in those, would have been apparently inconsistent with the designs of God in placing us on this earth.

A person on the summit of a tower, can behold a vast army at one glance of his eye; while another who is at the bottom, can only behold it by parts, and in succession. So we, who are stationed in
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one of the lowest posts of the intellectual creation, how could we, during the fifty, or even the hundred years, of a life destined chiefly to practical duties, how could we digest the innumerable designs, or comprehend the infinite perfections, of the Deity, though he should deign to reveal them to us?—Some great men have said, that, when God created this universe, all the possible plans were presented to his understanding; that he compared all those together, and chose the best. Let us, at present, suppose this thought to be just, without affirming or denying it. Let us suppose, at the same time, that God inclined to justify to our understandings the plan which he hath chosen. This is not practicable, unless by making us compare it with all the other possible plans. But, are fifty years, are a hundred years, of such disturbed and disquiet years as we enjoy, sufficient for this work? Doubtless, they are not. If, then, the spirit of God had loaded religion with an explication of all those combined truths, concerning which
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he has kept a profound silence, or of those mysteries which are only imperfectly revealed ; if he had explained fully the divine nature and essence, with all the immense combinations of its attributes ; if he had hurried us away beyond the bounds of time and space, to entertain our curiosity with the ideas which the infinite mind has revolved, during the absorbing periods that preceded the commencement of time, and which he shall revolve in those that succeed when time shall be no more ; if he had thus multiplied to infinitude our ideas of speculation, what opportunity could we have had for practical duties ? Distracted, as we are, by the cares of life ; busied by its necessities ; condemned, unavoidably, to mental or to bodily toil ; what time could we have had of giving relief to the miserable, assistance to the sick, and consolation to the afflicted, or even of studying and knowing our own hearts ?

The conduct of God, therefore, in setting bounds to our knowledge, is entirely worthy of his adorable wisdom. He has taught

taught us all our duty, with whatever is strictly connected to it, that so we might never be ignorant what we ought to do; and he has taught us no more, that so in our works of duty we might never be distracted. By this means, it is ordered so, that, to be a Christian, there is no necessity for being a philosopher. The doctrines of our religion, and the precepts of our morality, are warranted by the infallible witness of God; and, as they draw not their origin from the speculations of men, so they depend not on their approbation for their authority.

Thus we see, from our own nature and situation, that mysteries in religion are necessary: we shall perceive, upon enquiry, that they are equally so from their own nature; and that it is their very sublimity which is the cause of their darkness.

What are the mysteries of faith which we acknowledge? They regard the most sublime of all objects: the spiritual nature and essence of God; the attributes
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of the supreme, the eternal, the infinite Spirit. And we, poor mortals, who are absorbed and confounded in almost every research we make; whose understandings are baffled by the stone, weed, and worm on which we tread; can we be surprised that we do not comprehend those mysteries! can we be surprised that they are to us as a bottomless gulf! Not only on earth shall this vast knowledge be always beyond our power; but, even in heaven, we shall never attain to it; because God shall be always boundless, always above the ideas of finite beings; and because we shall be always finite and bounded creatures. By himself alone the Eternal can be perfectly known. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

We must conclude, therefore, that the prejudice taken against our religion, upon
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account of its mysteries, is a most absurd one; the subject of those mysteries being obviously too high for mortal reach; and, that this prejudice has not the smallest foundation in reason, but proceeds directly from pride of heart, and depravity of affection.

Must our weak understandings, unable to comprehend the essence of the lowest being in nature, must they be made the standard of the truth and importance of things, so that nothing shall be allowed to have an existence which we do not comprehend? We have no clear ideas of substances material or immaterial: shall we, therefore, with some admired philosophers, discard them all from existence itself, and reduce all our knowledge of the world, and all our affairs of life, to a mere dream, or fantastic vision! Shall we say that God is not almighty, and omniscient, because we cannot comprehend his power to perfection, and because his knowledge is too wonderful for us; when yet we are convinced, by the most familiar

familiar examples, that the ideas of one kind of power can furnish us with no idea of another kind of power, as actually existing; that the clearest perception of sound cannot convey to a blind man the faintest perception of colour? Or can we justify ourselves in the negligence of principles, for the truth of which we have the clearest evidence, and which are capable of being improved to the most important purposes, only because we cannot fully understand every thing relating to them?

To ask why God has left those obscurities on some parts of his Revelation, is to ask why he has not given us another nature than that which we have: why, instead of cloathing them with perishable flesh, he has not mounted our souls on the wings of seraphim. And these defects of our knowledge we must class with the other infirmities, which are inseparable from this life; with the pain, the sickness, the crosses, the infidelities, the losses, and the separations, which every one,

one, in some degree, must feel. To the sceptical objections, drawn from those obscurities, we must, therefore, answer in the same manner as we do to those which are drawn from our other calamities—that this earthly abode is not the place of consummate felicity. We may lament that our souls are so buried in matter: we may deplore the miseries of a life, where our reason is enslaved, where the sphere of our knowledge is so contracted, and where, at every step of our meditations and researches, we find ourselves stopped. We possess a soul most desirous of knowing, and of understanding; a soul susceptible of endless ideas and conceptions; a soul to which instruction is even as nourishment—and that soul is placed in a world where it can hardly know itself; where its most abstracted reasonings, and most sublime discoveries, resemble only the trifling sports of a child.

What are, in fact, all our laborious studies; what are the weary days and nights that we must spend, to attain even a mediocrity

diocrity in knowledge; what are all the instructions we receive, but so many marks of our childish state, but so many feeble means to convey to us truths more exalted than nature can afford? They are like the types made use of by God under the Jewish dispensation, to shadow out that more glorious one which was to succeed; and, for any thing we know, they may be as different in their proportions; that is—that the blood of bulls and of goats bore as little proportion to the victim of the new covenant, as our present discoveries shall bear to our future ones. Frequently, upon our advancement in knowledge, we have looked back with contempt on the degrees we had past; and we shall probably experience a similar feeling when admitted to the participation of that knowledge which is infinite. “When I became a man,” says the apostle, “I put away childish things.” A most beautiful idea of the great change which death shall produce in us. It shall draw

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the dark curtain which conceals from our eyes the most interesting objects; and present them, arrayed in all the powers of grandeur, and charms of novelty. What shall be the feelings of the good soul at that great change, when, instead of assisting in the assemblies of mortals, where the spirits of inconstancy and dissipation hover round the very altars, he shall join in the groups of happy saints, whose hearts on earth glowed with benevolence, and now are inflamed with celestial ardor: when, instead of listening to a man like himself, endeavouring to explain some imperfect ideas, the conceptions of a weak and limited mind, he shall find himself at the feet of the great Teacher of hearts, the author and finisher of our faith: when, instead of viewing some traces of God's attributes in the decoration of sublunary nature, he shall contemplate the most magnificent works of the Creator? His feelings must be supremely delightful! But this too is a mystery which we cannot

not at present comprehend; and which shall at last be revealed only TO THEM WHO KNOW GOD SO AS TO LOVE HIM. May the Almighty grant us all to be included in that number.

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S E R M O N XXIII.

I COR. xiii. 3.

THOUGH I GIVE ALL MY GOODS TO
FEED THE POOR, AND THOUGH I
GIVE MY BODY TO BE BURNED, AND
HAVE NOT CHARITY, IT PROFITETH
ME NOTHING.

THE word *Charity* hath been so frequently applied to munificence or almsgiving, that its meaning hath been almost wholly engrossed by that idea. Yet in the passage of holy Scripture, from which my text is taken, it is plainly a term of a much more extensive signification, and comprehends numberless other beneficent offices. "Charity," says the apostle, "behaves not itself unseemly:" it is guilty of no rudeness, or indecency. "It vaunts not itself:" it hath no tincture of pride, ostentation, or vanity. "It envies not, nor rejoiceth

rejoiceth in iniquity:" it abhors all malevolent and spiteful dispositions. "It thinks no evil, but hopes all things;" conceiving no groundless suspicions, but putting the most candid construction on every word and action. "It seeks not its own, rejoiceth in the truth, and is kind;" being ever open to conviction, having no sordid selfish views, but abounding with benignity, generosity, and compassion.

In this description, we see that St. Paul excludes every malevolent principle, and includes every social qualification; and that, therefore, the virtue which he describes may be justly styled Universal Benevolence: taken in this sense, it may be easily discovered, that a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet be destitute of charity.

The same external actions may proceed from very different internal principles; and donations to the poor may, therefore, be the effects of various causes: ostentation, for example, or the passion for popularity. There are certain times in which it is fashionable to be bountiful, and when

endowing of hospitals, and other such public charities, seems to be the reigning humour of the age. At such times the devotee to popular applause will not fail to make the utmost parade of his liberality. He will far exceed in his largesses the man of true charity, and sacrifice not only every principle of his mind, but perhaps also his external possessions, to please his idol passion.—In our Saviour's days, it was no uncommon thing for certain of the Jews to call the people together by sounding a trumpet, when they meant to bestow their alms; for which their pretence was the choice of proper objects, and the excitement of the like practice in others. It is not said, indeed, that any of them gave all they had to the poor; yet it is not incredible that some of them did, or at least that they might be inclined to it, by their ostentatious affectation of applause.—But what of real charity is there in all this? Is it not plain that the passion for popularity is wholly bent on its own gratification, without one thought of

of the piteous objects it relieves? and that the very act of giving relief, instead of being produced by generosity and accompanied with compassion, is the true child of selfishness and ostentation?

Superstition, in like manner, and enthusiasm, may produce the same delusive effects. Let us suppose a man, who by successful injustice hath accumulated immense stores of wealth, drawing near his end, and beginning to be struck with a sense of guilt, and a dread of some future reckoning. "Wherewithal," cries he, "shall I come before the Lord, or bow myself before the high God?" He has heard, perhaps, that charity will cover a multitude of sins; that feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, will be the principal topics of enquiry at the last judgment; and he therefore forms a resolution of bequeathing all his possessions to the poor. But what are the principles that move this man? Is there one spark of generosity in his heart? Has he any bowels of compassion for the needy, or any pity for the dis-

treffed? None! The terrors of conscience, and the hope of avoiding punishment, are his only motives. It is purely for his own sake that he is such a friend to the poor: and the same selfish principle which governed him in getting his substance, now also governs him in giving it away.

Another man we shall see, whose disposition resembles the pillar of fire and clouds between the Israelites and Egyptians, which gave light and comfort to the one, and darkness and distress to the other. He discharges all the offices of charity to persons of his own way of thinking; but treats those who differ from him in civil or religious opinions, as if that difference had dissolved all the ties of humanity, and authorized him to exercise the utmost insolence and barbarity. It is vain for such a bigot to pretend to divine charity, which, like the sun, shines without exception on all, and diffuseth its light and heat universally around. From these examples, it is clear, that a person may give the whole world to the poor, without any charitable intention, and
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without any thought of the objects, but only in so far as the relieving of them chances to be the means of gratifying his particular passion.—But is it possible that a man can give his body to be burnt, and that even for the religion of charity, and yet have no charity in himself? This seems more strange than the other, but is no less true. Some people, from natural constitution, are almost insensible of fear; and for the slightest occasions will set their lives upon a cast. The fear of death is a general, and very strong passion in human nature; yet a warm imagination, fired by enthusiastic zeal in any favourite cause, is frequently known, not only to suppress it, but to excite an earnest desire of meeting the flames: and in fact there have been several instances of this in the world. The cynic philosopher Peregrinus, who was for a considerable time a Christian, burnt himself publicly at the olympick games, in imitation, as he said, of Hercules; ending a life of extravagance and villany by an act of the wildest vain-glory and ambition. During
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the dark ages, it was no uncommon thing for religious bigots to prove the tenets of their faith by the fervency of their zeal; and their obstinacy was often taken for strength of argument. Under the pontificate of Alexander VI. a certain monk, in Italy, offered himself to be burnt, in confirmation of opinions which he professed. This was received as an incontestible proof of their truth, till another monk arose, as obstinate as the former, and made the same offer to establish opinions directly contrary. Here was demonstration against demonstration: all was involved in darkness; and nothing could be concluded with certainty, but that both the friars were mad, and the apostle's proposition unquestionably true—a man may give his body to be burned, and have no charity. The history of all ages and countries abounds with examples of inflexible zealots, who are ready to burn others, or to be burnt themselves, for the cause which they espouse; for zeal hath no necessary connection with truth, and as
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little with charity; and if there be no merit in a man's sacrificing his life for his religion, when it is done without charity, there must be a very great demerit in that uncharitable zeal which, for the sake of religion, destroys the lives of other men. If, in the bare absence of this virtue, we are assured, that a spirit to suffer martyrdom will profit us nothing; what shall we say of a persecuting, sanguinary spirit, the very reverse of charity? And if, without a wedding garment, we shall not gain admittance to the kingdom of heaven; what shall be the fate of those whose garments are steeped in blood, and stained with cruelty? He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewn himself unmerciful.

It behoves us chiefly, not to affect any ostentatious shew of this virtue, nor to build our opinions of it on the reports of the multitude; but, as from ourselves we can best know ourselves, to look into our own hearts, and examine the principles we act upon. Let the humane and generous
temper

temper be cultivated; let the heart go always before the hand; and the feeling of distress be always the motive for redressing it. Universal benevolence, as being the most excellent of moral attainments, and the crown of Christian perfections, deserves to possess the chief place in our affections. Charity, for aught we know, may be accepted without faith; but we are certain that faith without charity will profit nothing. If our belief be void of benevolence, we believe we know not what, and are zealous for promoting a religion in others, which hath no place in ourselves. We shall bear the name of Christian absurdly and impiously, if our Christianity detract from our humanity; and we shall totally pervert our religion, which qualifies us for the society of angels, if we make it an occasion of disqualifying us for the society of men. Let us, therefore, make charity the object of our zeal; let us be zealously charitable, and charitably zealous: let us be emulous in good works, and provoke one another to deeds of brotherly kindness.

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This is the grand characteristic of our religion, by which alone we ought to distinguish ourselves: without it we may be vassals of ambition or avarice, slaves of prejudice and passion, bigots in superstition and enthusiasm, but never servants of God, nor disciples of Jesus Christ. As goodness is the most amiable of the divine attributes, and as God hath created us after his own image, chiefly by marking us for benevolent beings, and blessing us with large capacities for doing good; on what virtue could our gracious Creator lay more stress than on this, by which we heighten our resemblance to him, and raise the human to a godlike nature? For the same reason, it is easy to suppose that the sacred Author of our religion hath made it the mark by which his followers are to be known; "By this," said he, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." Let, therefore, the exhibition of this virtue in our practice be the declaration of the religion which reigns in our hearts. When we profess Christianity,

tianity, we profess a religion of patience and benevolence; we undertake to banish from our hearts all envy and malice; we vow to live peaceably, to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to be in charity with all men: if we fail in these things, we become a scandal to our religion; and whatever our principles may be, our practice is anti-christian. How inconsistent must it be, by the spirit of hatred, to enforce the doctrines of love! or, by persecution and bloodshed, to support the religion of meekness and charity! To be angry with our brother for differing from us in opinion, is to throw ourselves from the faith, by the very means that we use to restore him to it. The unity of the church is best preserved by unity of affection; and the worst of heresies is the want of charity. The Samaritan who discovered the wounded traveller, between Jericho and Jordan, did not stay to enquire what nation, people, or religion he was of; but, as the miserable object bore a human form, he could not help bearing a human heart towards him; he
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was in fact his neighbour, because he did him neighbourly offices: and this is the true character of charity, which the Author of our faith commands us to bear towards all the sons of men. Let our faith then work by love; and if we cannot be all of one opinion, yet let us be all of one heart. By our gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, let us prove what spirit we breathe, and whose disciples we are. May Christianity ever convey to us the idea of love; and no other contention be found among its members, but that of outvying each other in benevolence. May we heap coals of fire on the heads of our enemies, only by heartily forgiving, and generously assisting them: and may we shew forth the excellency of our religion, and confute the cavils of its adversaries, by approving ourselves the most faithful friends to mankind, and the most worthy members of society. So shall we be indeed the sons of that God whose mercy is inexhaustible, and whose kindness knows no bounds: so shall we be faithful followers of *him* who

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devoted himself a sacrifice of love for all the human race: so shall we in due time be fitted for inhabiting those peaceful regions, where the gloomy spirit of malignity shall never enter, but harmony and love eternally reign.

S. E. R.

S E R M O N XXIV.

M A T T. xii. 50.

WHOSOEVER SHALL DO THE WILL OF MY
FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, THE
SAME IS MY BROTHER, AND SISTER,
AND MOTHER.

NATURE and religion both re-
quire that we should regard our
brethren as parts of ourselves. By these
sacred guides we find ourselves commanded
to love all with the most cordial affec-
tion, and to do good to all as far as we
are able; especially to such as are of the
household of faith, or those to whom we
are united by the stricter bonds of consan-
guinity. But, if it is our duty to love our
neighbours as ourselves, it is also our duty
to love the Lord God with all our heart;

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and if at any time these two may interfere, the lesser must of necessity yield to the greater: for, "he that loveth father or mother more than me," said the Saviour of the world, "is not worthy of me." In like manner, if we ought to despise the friendship of those men who despise the friendship of Heaven, we ought also to form the strictest connections with those whose piety is most eminent. The degree of their attachment to God ought to regulate the degree of our attachment to them.

In the words which I read for my text, and the verses immediately preceding them, we see a most remarkable example of this disposition. Certain of the Jews came and told our Lord that his mother and his brethren desired to speak with him; "Who is my mother?" answered he, "and who are my brethren? Then stretching forth his hand to his disciples, he said, Behold my mother and my brethren!—for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." His design,

design, in thus seeming not to acknowledge his relations according to the flesh, was not to disengage us from persons with whom we are connected by nearness of blood, nor to dispense with those kind offices which that connection calls for at our hands. On the contrary, the tender parents, who seem to wish for nothing but the happiness of their children; the children, warmed with filial gratitude, who, after having been the delight of their father during the vigour of his years, continue to be his support and comfort when age has frozen up his strength and weakened his faculties; the brothers and sisters, who give to the world the most beautiful examples of union and concord — these are all formed by the religion of Jesus Christ; they follow its maxims of charity, and breathe its very spirit of love. All that our Saviour meant, therefore, by this action, was, to teach us that he has a family according to the spirit, as well as according to the flesh: that the spiritual family is preferable to the carnal; united by

a stricter bond of fellowship, and infinitely greater in its extent; so infinitely extended, indeed, that every man who conforms to the bond of union is adopted into this great family of heaven and earth, and enjoys all the privileges of a son.

This bond of union, we are told, is obedience to the will of God: in considering of which, we have two errors to avoid; that our notions be neither too severe, nor too lax. We shall greatly err in forming them too severe. I mean not that any one can possibly carry his obedience to the laws of God too far: No! though we could be ready, like Abraham, to sacrifice a beloved child; though we could, like Moses, esteem the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt; though we had the fervor of Elijah, the piety of David, the zeal of Josiah, the tenderness of St. John, the activity of St. Peter; still we could not carry too far our obedience to the divine law. But though we cannot exceed in this disposition, we may certainly form too severe ideas of the degree
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which will entitle us to be gathered to the flock of Jesus Christ. He knows of what we are made: his religion is not made for angels, it is made for men; and, however holy these men may be, their virtues will always be tinged with failings inseparable from human nature. Those disciples, to whom our Lord stretched forth his hand in friendship, those very disciples had their infirmities; they committed faults, and great ones too: sometimes we see them mistaking the design of their master; sometimes distrusting his promises; slow of heart, in believing the prophecies which foretold him; giving way to sloth, when they ought to have watched him with care; abandoning him to his persecutors; and denying his acquaintance to execration. Yet, it is foolish to doubt that those men are among the number of his spiritual brethren. The sincerest virtue is not incompatible with great weaknesses; and therefore it is wrong to form our notions of it too severe.

But we must shun, with equal care, to form our ideas too lax. The will of God demands not only negative virtues: to obey it, is not to abstain from evil. It commands us, not only to forbear evil speaking, but to abhor and to oppose it: not only to beware of taking another's goods, but to communicate our own in acts of generosity: not only to tremble at the thoughts of blaspheming the Divinity, but to bless and to praise him continually. The will of God demands from us, not only the virtues which are fashionable; such as are sometimes sincerity, fidelity, courage, and obedience to superiors: it demands likewise all others, though despised and ridiculed by a dissolute age—purity, forgiveness of injuries, and humility. The will of God requires, not only such virtues as agree with our humour, as retirement, if one is naturally wild and unfociable; abstinence from pleasure, if one is naturally cold and melancholy; patience, if one is naturally heavy, dull, and indolent: it requires also every other virtue, however discordant

cordant with our humour; as patience, from the headstrong; moderation, from the warm and sensible; and so of all the rest. " Finally, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise—these are comprehended in sincere obedience to the will of God."

Having thus seen the nature, and of consequence the excellency and perfection, of this band, we may next consider its great strength. Its strength is so great, that the unity which subsists among the members of this family, is not to be compared to any earthly confederation. We see our Lord borrowing images from all that is tender among men, to give us some idea of the connection which he has with his members, and which they have with one another. " He who doeth the will of my father, is my brother, and sister, and mother." If we could join in one whatever of strictest friendship is found among men, " Relations dear, and all the chari-

ties of father, son, and brother," yet that were insufficient to give a perfect image of the ties which unite the members of the family of Jesus Christ. They are united in design, in interest, and even in existence. Their design is the same; for, in all their actions, the principal end is the glory of that great Being, whom they serve with emulation and obey with one accord. Their interest is the same—rejoicing to see the reins of the universe in the hands of their common Lord; and aspiring after one common happiness of enjoying the communications of his bounty: their very existence is the same. If we mount to those periods which preceded the foundation of the world, we see them existing in the bosom of the divine mercies; and the grand victim already appointed for the expiation of their sins. If we descend to the last periods of this present world, or to those ages that shall succeed when the world must be no more, we may still see them united in the same noble design—suffering no moment of eternity to pass, but

but what is passed in praising the author of their being and of their happiness.

If this bond of unity be strong, it is no less soft. Ties that are merely human, however sweet they may be, with whatever charms they may be adorned, have still their portion of bitterness. How bitter are those connections of which sin is the bond! What stings are felt in the midst of the delights they procure! What poison do they give to reflection! What bitterness is caused, even by innocent friendships, when carried to a certain height! Delicious are the unions that are formed by similitude of disposition, increased by reciprocal love, and crowned by prosperity! Delicious are the unions of a father with a child, and of a husband with his spouse! Soft are the sweets they bring; but bitter the sorrows they cause when broken, when destroyed by death, the destroyer of all human things! Witness the weeping Josephs, accompanying to the grave those fathers, who were the pride and glory of their family:

mily: witness the mournful Rachels, who will not be comforted, because their dear children are no more: witness the Davids, exclaiming in their excess of grief, "My son, my son, would to God I had died for thee!" Far different is the bond which connects the family of Jesus Christ; and it is that indeed which alone can remove the gall from our innocent and virtuous friendships.

But who are they who can enjoy this privilege? and who are they that compose this family? They are the virtuous and the faithful in every age and nation: for, "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Often, indeed, the members of this family make no great appearance to eyes of flesh; but they are always seen by the eyes of him to whom all things are naked and open: they are not always the objects of sense, but they are always the objects of faith, which makes us believe in the holy catholic church. Sometimes it is the rage of persecution which hinders them
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from being observed, by which they are driven to lurk in holes and caves of the earth. Sometimes it is the rage of calumny, which, with infernal artifice, can blacken their characters; representing their moderation, as indolence; their cheerfulness, as levity; their modesty, as meanness; their firmness, as obstinacy; their hope, as folly; and their piety, as madness. Most frequently it is their own humility; which, covering their virtues with a decent veil, occasions their being for some time unknown, while affectation and impudence succeed before them. But those members, though unseen, are not less real. It is for them that the world as yet subsists. It is their prayers that stay the avenging hand of an angry God, and ward off the destruction of sinful communities. It is their prayers that shall at length bring down their God and their Redeemer, and hasten that happy day, when their numbers shall be completed, and their felicity secured.

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Nor is this kindred of Jesus Christ confined to the earth; for "of him the whole family of heaven and earth is named." It is in heaven that it shines forth in all its splendor. There are the redeemed of all people, nations, and languages: there are the heroes of religion, who, for having turned many to righteousness, shine bright for ever as the stars in the firmament: there are the angels, powerful in strength: there are the seraphim, burning with love: there are the thousand thousands that minister to the Eternal, and the ten thousand times ten thousand that stand before him.

Such is the spiritual family of Jesus Christ; and such is the spiritual family of every Christian. What consolation! what transports! for a faithful believer, upon whom age, infirmity, or mortal disease has pronounced sentence of death! What consolation in that thought! "My friends are in heaven," he may say, "and I go to meet them. Between us lies a gulf, indeed; but it is not a gulf which cannot

cannot be passed. Hope shall support me; the voice of my elder brother shall animate me; and one last groan shall end all my woes. Then shall I recognize those friends whose departure cost me so many tears. Then shall come around me those spirits who were linked to mine; like the soul of David to that of Jonathan. Then shall I see those venerable ancestors, whose memory is so dear to me, whose examples I have admired and endeavoured to imitate. Then shall I find those friends of my heart, whose loss im poisoned the best of my days, but whose death the Almighty hastened, that he might hasten their happiness."

This idea of death, and of the succeeding felicity, is peculiarly comfortable: I even believe it to be most true; at least I am certain, it is not impossible to the power, nor inconsistent with the wisdom of God; and, till this can be shewn, I will not cease to believe it. But this idea, though beautiful, is too narrow; we must form nobler

nobler conceptions of the future happiness. Our family is in heaven: but it is not composed of the small number of friends who have been snatched from us by death. Let us recollect all that is said in the word of God concerning this noble company of saints and angels, and surely we must be inspired with holy ambition to increase the number. Earthly nobility we reckon of great account, and high descent we boast of with vanity: but what are these, compared with being friends of Jesus Christ and sons of the Most High? Yet to thee, O Christian! to thee, though the poorest mortal that ever suffered misery, though, like the Jews, thy father were an Ammonite and thy mother an Hittite, to thee is this vast privilege open. It depends upon thyself to be numbered with the family of the ever-blessed God. Take his attributes for thy model, and a portion of his glory shall be thy reward. To thee shall the Lord Jesus stretch forth the hand of friendship: to thee shall he address

dress that comfortable welcome, " Come, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast done the will of my father: henceforth be to me as a brother, partner of my affection, and partaker of my felicity."

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S E R M O N XXV.

I KINGS, xxii. 8.

I HATE HIM, FOR HE DOTH NOT
PROPHECY GOOD CONCERNING ME,
BUT EVIL.

THERE is perhaps nothing in which the human heart is more instant and equivocal than in its affection for truth. Truth is loved, or hated; it is sought, or shunned; it is received with joy, or rejected with abhorrence; entirely according to its agreement with our inclinations, as it happens to flatter our self-love, or to reprove our follies. It is not, however, a paradox, but a certain point of morality, that there is
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no truth which we ought to love more than that which reprove us — because, there is none more difficult to be known; there is none leads more to the knowledge of ourselves; and there is none more proper for the correction and perfection of our souls.

Next to the knowledge of God, there is no point more worthy of attention than to know ourselves. “No man was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and conditions of other men: but that man is necessarily unhappy who does not observe himself, and consider the state of his own soul.” Yet we may be well assured, that however careful our observations of this kind are, they will still be defective: small imperfections will be quite unseen, and groffer faults much diminished; over those self-love continually spreads her cloud, and few are the eyes which are able to pierce it. We must therefore either renounce all attempts of knowing ourselves, or endeavour to supply the defects of our own knowledge, by attending to

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the opinions of others: and as those will frequently communicate disagreeable and mortifying remarks, we must resolve to take them in good part, since we have not sufficient light of our own, to discover them. Such a disposition appears to be of universal obligation. When a sick man finds a physician who points out distinctly the causes and progress of his disease, far from being offended, he esteems and honours him: the more unsuspected and uncommon his disease is, the more he holds himself obliged to that man who had skill to discover, and sincerity to tell it.

If we judge thus in regard to bodily diseases, what sentiments ought we to entertain when the maladies of our souls are in question? When some brother, moved with Christian charity, tells us of our follies and vices, we ought to hold his words of inestimable price, as being not only words of knowledge and reproof, but of correction and amendment. Other truths can instruct us, move us, and convince us, though perhaps they change us not; but truths of this kind, by the most powerful reasoning, the
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most moving instruction, and the most rapid conviction, have the effect of converting us. This they effect by disclosing our errors, and obliging us to forsake them by penitence; two emotions which naturally succeed each other, and naturally tend to the perfection of man. For, whereas the good opinion which we have of ourselves, by its flattering suggestions, dissipates our thoughts upon a thousand vanities; the truth which speaks only reproaches recalls them from those vain excursions, and fixeth them upon objects of a very different complexion: we retire within ourselves, and finding that ruinous and desolate which we before thought beautiful and cultivated, the view becomes altogether insufferable; we are forced to make an effort to rise above ourselves, which is the first true symptom of penitence. Thus a word spoken in season will often be sufficient in such cases to tear from the heart a vicious habit or passion. At first it may excite trouble and anger; but reason will soon surmount that wayward feeling; and the reproof, though

bitter, being directed by a solid and temperate mind, will begin to operate, and even its bitterness become an indication of cure. To reject these admonitions, therefore, at least if they are not disguised, weakened, and diminished; to refuse them with abhorrence, unless they be softened, and all that is strong and pungent removed away; this is to rank ourselves with incurables, and to poison the very medicines that are proper for our recovery. Such a disposition is evidently inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity; for, let us reason as much as we please upon our duties, we shall never be freed from our agreeable vices, but by disagreeable remedies.

The point of importance is to find a man of sense, firmness, and real friendship, who shall discover to us this remedy: such a friend Solomon considers as a treasure; and it is a treasure rarely to be found. For this reason we ought to esteem disagreeable truth the more precious, because it is that particularly which men industriously conceal from us. We
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know the great maxim of worldly wisdom is, to keep silence in disagreeable truths, at least to preserve silence to those to whom they would be of the highest use and importance: for in divulging them to those who are not concerned to know them, who ought to be ignorant of them, in this we give ourselves sufficient liberty. We mention often what is true and proper; but seldom mention it to the person whom it properly concerns. We say it imprudently, maliciously, and revengefully; but seldom wisely and charitably: even while we are breaking the laws of charity and duty, by spreading a hateful truth all around, we make it a point of false charity and duty to conceal it from the only man who could profit by it. That such conduct is hateful in the sight of God we cannot doubt, when we consider, that eternal truth is one of his inseparable attributes. We have besides, in the sacred Scriptures, several strong exhortations to the contrary. The prophet Isaiah is commanded to "cry aloud, and lift up his voice like a trumpet."

He is not bid to preach curious, subtle, or agreeable things; but such as would astonish, confound, “and shew the people their transgressions.”

Jeremiah too introduceth his prophecies with an account of the charge given him by God: “I have made thee this day an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land:—they shall fight against thee, but be not afraid of their faces.” Tell them their faults boldly: be the apostle, and, if it is needful, the martyr, of truth. For this cause I sanctified and ordained thee a prophet: and if thou shalt keep silence in the cause of truth, who shall dare to declare it?

In like manner we find St. Paul exhorting his disciple Timothy “to preach the word, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort: for,” says he, “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.”

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We cannot suppose that so many directions would have been given by the spirit of God for reproofing mankind, if such reproof were not of the highest utility. We should therefore consider it as our duty to love truth the more in proportion as it offends our self-conceit; to respect those who shew it to us, and to think they do us good service, even when they tell it importunately, and with a bad grace: for “faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” And, because there is nothing at the bottom more difficult than to communicate such information, we ought, as far as we can, to remove the difficulty out of *their* way from whom we expect this good office, by giving them free and favourable access; by witnessing, not only in words, but by an equal conduct, that we pay them proper deference; that we hearken to them, not only with docility, but with joy, in the persuasion that they give us a most solid mark of their zeal, and in the fear that too much delicacy on our part may shut their mouth.

If there is any thing which demands a purer generous, disinterested zeal, it is the shewing a hidden blemish to him who believes himself sound; the announcing a disagreeable discovery to him who believes himself irreprehensible. Hence ariseth the indispensable obligation which we have of making ourselves easy, mild and humble in spirit, when we receive counsel and reproof: since it is one of the most essential precepts of the law of God, to put away from us every thing which may hinder our conversion; and, under the pain of answering for our ignorance as crimes, the more difficult it is to tell us what offends our self-love, the more we should be disposed to honour it by our manner of reception. It was thus the unfortunate king of Babylon did, of whom the Scripture speaks, when Daniel, with the liberty of a prophet, told him the most dreadful tidings — that he was weighed, and found wanting in the judgment of God, and that his kingdom was taken from him, and given to the Medes and Persians. Every one we
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may suppose in the royal presence trembled at the boldness of this discourse, gave the prophet up for lost, and believed that Belshazzar would certainly sacrifice him to the first transports of his rage. But that prince had still some greatness of soul left in spite of all his dissipations, and therefore he judged very differently. He thought, that a man who could have the courage to announce such fortune to an absolute king, and who, to acquit himself of this heroic duty, could forget all self-interest—that a man of this character deserved all sorts of honours, and could not be too much exalted, “Then at his command they cloathed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

If we put ourselves in the balance with this infidel king, we shall certainly be found wanting. Deluded by our passions, we acknowledge nothing for truth but what pleases them: hence we love the truth that is specious and shining; but
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that which is severe and mortifying we cannot suffer: hence we regard every severe advice as a persecution, and rise up in rage against the person who has the audacity to give it, as if he did us an irreparable wrong: hence arise disgusts and resentments, averfions and hatreds, misunderstandings and separations. How many connections have been broken, how many friendships renounced, and how many wars declared, only for speaking freely the truth!

What is still more strange, we often hate those observations for the very reason which ought to make them amiable, because they are strictly true: for if those reproaches were less true we should not be so much offended. But the storm of our rage is raised, because the thing is truer than we wish it to be, and we cannot deny it.

This vice is universal. It is not only the vice of the Great, with whom a word of truth is often a word of death: it is also the vice of the Small, who in the mediocrity of their condition are often equally
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untractable with regard to their faults. ' It is not only the vice of the imperfect, but also of the devout and the spiritual; for we may find some men who seem possessed of sentiments of the purest piety; who breathe nothing but God and his glory; sage in their conduct, and severe in their maxims; who yet are incapable of receiving a reproof. Marvellous people those are for telling the faults of their neighbours; but sensible, even to weakness, when they are obliged to hear their own. This produces a doubt that the good which these sort of Christians seem to have, is delusive—for true wisdom and true virtue can bear the sight of their imperfections, “ and have their sins ever before them.” Even in the preaching of the gospel, where we suppose that God himself speaks to us, hardly can we support a disagreeable reproof. Not but that we love the preachers who inculcate the strictest morality; but our docility and orthodoxy continue only so long as they keep aloof from our favourite vices. Let them
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expatiate as much as they please on the faults of others, we can hearken to them with joy, and load them with applause: but from the moment that they bring ourselves into the induction, the disciple is changed into the critic and the censor, and we hate our pastors for the same reason that the king of Israel hated his prophet, because they do not prophesy good concerning us, but evil.—I pretend not to justify a manner, neither judicious nor charitable, which, instead of instructing and moving, insults and outrages. I only complain of that affected refinement, so common among men, which cannot bear the recital of their faults: the consequence of which is, that their truth is made known in spite of them, while they themselves are ignorant of it.

Let us be exhorted to preserve ourselves from so fatal a blindness—to open our eyes to truth—to love it always, and especially when it reproves us. Let the meanness of the parasite, the pious frauds of the indiscreet zealot, the maxims of worldly wisdom and of false refinement, be alike held unworthy

worthy of our regard. Finally, let every one speak the truth from his heart, and let us receive it with joyfulness: remembering always, that the praises of a flatterer bring poison along with them; while the charitable reproofs of a friend will draw us from our errors, will replace us in the way in which we ought to walk, and bring us in the end to life eternal.

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S E R M O N XXVI.

JOHN, xi. 4.

THIS SICKNESS IS NOT UNTO DEATH.

WHAT our Lord says, in this passage, respecting bodily sickness, we imagine very commonly of our spiritual distempers, "that they are not unto death." Under this notion, we regard them as weaknesſes incident to human nature, unavoidable in our present ſtate, and of no bad conſequence in the Chriſtian life. We ſuffer them in ourſelves without ſcruple; we live without any deſign to cure them, and even without concern to avoid them: yet it is certain, that a faithful diſcharge

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of our smallest obligations is an essential part of Christian piety, to which alone is promised the grace of perseverance and the crown of immortality. It is certain too, that no true piety can be without this rectitude and firmness: for the man who thinks he observes all the essential parts of the law, while he freely allows himself in smaller transgressions, which are not directly included in the letter, this man deceives himself, and his religion is vain. Our chief mistake in this matter is, that we consider those faults only with regard to the law, whose great commands perhaps they do not violate: but this rule of our judgments is defective; because wickedness takes not its character entirely from the laws it breaks, but also from the heart that produceth it, and the consequences it brings on. If the minds of men were impressed with proper sentiments of the majesty of God, it would be perfectly needless to prove, that whatever offends him cannot be slight. The supreme dignity of his nature, opposed to
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our lowness, gives to our offences, however slight they may appear to us, an enormity which we cannot conceive; but which is always in proportion to our meanness, and the grandeur of that Being whom we offend. Thus, when the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness were punished with pestilence, when their murmurers were swallowed up in the earth, and others burnt with lightning; when many sudden and awful punishments frequently declared to them the purity and majesty of God; his law then appeared venerable and terrible in its smallest circumstances. The sister of their high priest, for a single murmur, was struck with leprosy; their leader himself, for a simple distrust, was denied entrance into the land of promise; and a small booty, reserved from the plunder of a city, exposed their whole nation to be vanquished in battle. In this view, there is no sin which can properly be termed slight: for if the Almighty were extreme to mark what is done amiss; if he were above all things

things concerned to avenge his honour and glory, when by us offended; for the slightest of our offences we might justly fear his vengeance upon our heads.

Not that I mean to confound venial sins with those that are mortal; for the difference between these is very great. The first kind do not extinguish our love to God, although they weaken it; but the last banish charity from the heart: the first only grieve the Holy Spirit; the last drive him away: but yet every transgression, however slight it may be, is an unjust preference which we make of the creature to the Creator. By breaking the divine law in its less essential points, we prefer a fleeting pleasure, which results from that transgression, to the law of God, and, consequently, to God himself: but thus to prefer, in any circumstance, the creature to God, is a plain insult done to him; and an insult done to a Being so great, so holy, so worthy of all respect, can never, without folly, be considered as a trifle.

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To prove the danger of those sins, it is needless to seek for external evidence: it is sufficient to consider the dispositions of the heart from whence they proceed. When at any time we allow ourselves without scruple these slighter infidelities, when we are contented to live in a state of exemption from presumptuous sin, then we have plainly renounced all hope and desire of perfection; we are no more concerned at the frequent back-slidings that retard us in our journey, nor solicitous to arrive at that exalted pitch of virtue to which the word of God directs us, and his grace inclines us. "Be ye perfect," says the Divine Spirit, "as your Father in heaven is perfect." In which precept no degree of perfection attainable by us on earth being specified, it becomes evidently the duty of every Christian to be always endeavouring and striving after perfection. But when we confine our endeavours to what we judge, perhaps falsely, the essential parts of the law, and take free licence in all other transgressions, which seem not deadly to the soul,

soul, we then abandon that work and labour of love, which by our great Lord we are commanded to perfect.

Besides this very attention which we exhibit, to examine whether an offence be venial or mortal; to dispute with God every thing that we can refuse him without a crime; to study his law with a desire only to know how far it may be broken with impunity; this very attention can proceed from nothing but a heart overgrown with self-love, in which faith and charity begin to languish, and over which the spirit of God reigns not sole lord: only the foolish virgins keep their lamps untrimmed till the last moment; only the prodigal children use their rights with rigour, and demand their portion from their father.

This disposition, indeed, which makes us allow ourselves all that we believe not worthy of eternal death, is the disposition of a mercenary and of a slave. For, if we could hope for equal indulgence in the violation of the essential points of the

law, these would be violated as easily as the least: and our obedience proceeds not from our love to justice, but our fear of punishment. It is not the Lord we have regard to, it is ourselves only: while his glory only is concerned, and no advantage to ourselves will ensue, then we fear not to offend him: we even excuse our iniquities, by saying that they are not mortal; that they only displease God, without exposing us to his eternal vengeance. Thus his honour enters not at all into the distinction we make between venial and deadly sins; it is only our self-interest that, in this respect, regulates our obedience. But, in a soul thus disposed, can there remain one spark of divine love? Does that charity, which we believe of so great avail, thus regard its own interests? No! when one loves truly, self-interest is despised; and nothing is desirable or hateful but only as it is pleasing or displeasing to the beloved object. A different conduct is a certain indication of the decay of love: and the man who commits a fault, though

though he knows it displeasing to God, in the belief that he runs no hazard of everlasting fire, this man serves not the Lord in sincerity and truth: his piety is no more than a natural fear, which makes him tremble at the threatenings of God: he is like that wicked servant who hid his talent in a napkin because his lord was an austere man, but otherwise would have dissipated it in foolish expence: and in the preparation of the heart, which God principally regards, he is an open transgressor, and a child of death.

Even without regarding these dispositions, this state of indolence and looseness is of itself exceeding doubtful, and surely more inclined to vice than virtue. Who can conceive the insensible progress and diminution of divine grace in the soul? Who can determine with precision the fatal boundary which, in the heart, separates life from death, and light from darkness? A little more or a little less confidence; a movement of the heart more deliberate or more sudden; an act of the will more finished

or more imperfect; an omission in which there is more or less of contempt; a thought just bordering upon sin, or going beyond it; these are difficulties and doubts, at the view of which blind men can only tremble; and the manifestation of which God hath reserved for the terrible day of his vengeance. It is for this that the most holy men have always been the most watchful over themselves; abstaining even from what was allowable, lest they should fall into what was forbidden; and hardly daring to speak of the state of their soul, or the merit of their actions.—And yet we, whose actions are often criminal, and much oftener doubtful; who walk among so many dangers and daily temptations; who seldom examine with attention the state of our souls; who, like David, have but a step between us and death; in the midst of all these dangers we can calm ourselves with a pretended habit of justice, and boast with confidence that we have escaped the great transgression. We may justly fear, however, that our calm is deceitful, and our confidence ill-founded.

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For, though it be true, that there are some sins unto death, and others not, as the Christian church has always believed, and as the Scripture expressly teacheth, yet the rules which distinguish them can neither be sure nor universal; for a thousand circumstances may happen which change greatly the nature of a trespass. It is the disposition of the heart which determines the measure and quality of our faults; and often what is only weakness and surprize in a good man, is malice and corruption in a sinner. Examples of this are easily found. Saul, contrary to the command of God, spared the king of Amalec, and whatever was valuable among the spoils of that prince: the offence appears not very considerable; but because it proceeded from pride, vain-glory, and confidence in his victory, it was highly displeasing to God, and became the cause of many misfortunes to that unhappy monarch. Joshua, on the contrary, spared the Gibeonites, whom God had ordered to be exterminated with the other nations; he went not to consult before the ark of God,

till he had made an alliance with those deceivers: but because this fault proceeded rather from surprize than disobedience; because his heart was still humble, religious, and faithful; it appeared slight in the eyes of God, and easily obtained forgiveness.

If this principle then is incontestible, what can we depend upon, when we regard our trespasses as slight and inconsiderable? Do we know all the corruption of our hearts, from whence they proceed? God knows it; he who is the searcher and the judge of hearts, and whose eyes are far different from those of man. But, if it is allowed us to judge before the time, we may consider whether a habit of indolence and languor, of voluntary perseverance in a state that is displeasing to God, of contempt towards duties which we believe not essential, and of negligence to do any thing for God but when he opens the infernal abyss beneath our feet—we may consider if this be a state which in the sight of God can appear worthy of a Christian.

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The consequences which attend this state will convince us still more of its danger. He who despiseth small things will soon fall in those that are great. It is the artifice of the tempter, to draw us into his snare by little and little, and never to propose a great crime at first. In this manner he proceeded when he attempted the Saviour of the world: he begins by desiring him to change some stones into bread; that is, only to relax a little the austerity of his fast: afterward, he desires him to throw himself down from the temple; to expose himself rashly to danger, in confidence of God's protection: all this, before he durst propose that he should fall down and worship him. That would have been the way to affright his prey: but he knows too well the road to the human heart: he knows that the timid conscience must be gradually hardened against the horrors of iniquity; and therefore at first proposeth only certain desirable ends and moderate pleasures; he attacks not for some time as a lion, but as a serpent; he does not directly plunge us into the pit of
vice,

vice, but leads us to it by turnings and winding ways. Thus David was idle and imprudent before he was adulterous: Solomon was effeminate before he became idolatrous: Judas loved money before he betrayed his master; and Peter presumed before he denied him. Vice hath its progress as well as virtue: as day instructeth day, so night gives fatal lessons to night; and the gradations of sinning are perhaps very imperceptible between suspending the operations of grace, strengthening all the passions, rendering the ordinary succours of religion useless—and utterly destroying the soul. And can any thing which conducts to sin and death, can any thing which leads infallibly to it, appear slight to the mind of a Christian, who has yet any regard for his salvation? But, after all, though we should grant that these faults are really slight, this makes not the least excuse for us; for, if they are slight, they are so much the easier to be avoided. If the Almighty commanded us to do some great thing, we would surely do it; we would rise in all our strength,

strength, and conquer or die. Let us not, then, after avoiding the greatest dangers, allow ourselves to be overcome of trifles, but triumph over our languor and coldness. If we have hitherto resisted the grosser vices, let us not leave our work imperfect, but with unwearied diligence be continually striving to render ourselves worthy of that immortal life which is promised to such as are faithful in small things as well as in great.

S E R-

S E R M O N XXVII.

JOHN, x. 16.

THERE SHALL BE ONE FOLD, AND ONE
SHEPHERD.

THAT infinite Spirit who framed at first the vast scheme of the universe, had unquestionably all the parts presented in one comprehensive view. Every event and every creature he clearly saw, and determined their arrangement in the manner most worthy of infinite wisdom; adjusting the frame and state of every being so as might be fittest for the good of the whole. This great design he executed and still preserves by fixed and general laws, or by the necessary interpositions of a particular providence, which
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also made a part of the original plan. Such knowledge is, indeed, too high and wonderful for us, we cannot attain to it; but easy and familiar to the all-comprehending mind, to which every thing past, every thing present in the immense universe, and every thing possible in all the revolutions of eternity, is distinctly known.

We can however observe, from this state of things, that we ought never to consider ourselves merely as individuals, each possess of his particular interest, entirely detached either from that of his own species, or from that of universal nature. To think so, would be to think as if we stood alone in the immensity of space, and as if there were no other creatures related to us; which we know to be the very reverse of the truth. Each, indeed, hath a separate, a peculiar interest, but ought never to consider this as un subordinate to the good of the universal system; on the contrary, the particular interest should be regarded as connected with the universal, as dependent upon it, and in many instances

stances to be determined by it. The connections we stand in with our fellow-creatures, with the inferior animals, and even with the globe assigned us for our habitation, are obvious to every attentive person. We see also what connection this globe has with other members of our solar system; and we know not what connection this system may have with surrounding ones. Our connection with the world of spirits is also but imperfectly known: but that there is such a world, we are well assured, and a great one too, both with respect to the number and variety of its inhabitants.—Equally well are we assured that when we leave this visible world we shall go into that other, and have a place assigned us in it agreeable to our real qualities and characters.—For other sheep there are, which are not of this fold, to them we must be brought, and there shall be one fold under one Shepherd.

Considering these our extensive relations, the greatness of the fold, and the greatness and goodness of the Shepherd, we cannot
fail

fail to reflect, that it is our duty to be contented with that order which the supreme universal Father hath contrived for the good of the whole, however it may seem in many instances to affect our private interest, by appointing us to pain and suffering.

To become insensible to our own interest, indeed, is impossible; and, if it were possible, would be unnatural. No man, for example, could be contented with a state of unmixed misery, for this cannot be; and the philosophy that should pretend to teach such insensibility would be justly ridiculous. Yet still we are ever to regard ourselves as parts of one great family, the good of which, as it is the object of the universal Father, ought also to be attended to by every individual, in so far that, when the good of the whole may require, all partial interest is to be foregone. We see this order takes place in the smaller systems formed among men. The public good of the community often requires what is grievous to some individuals.

Thus

Thus likewise in the natural body, what is necessary for the welfare of the whole may be very grievous to a part; or it may be necessary to exterminate some parts entirely: yet all this is wisely borne with patience. So also in the great system, that may be conducive to universal happiness which shall inflict particular suffering. This ariseth from the very nature of things: and is never to be considered abstractly, as matter of choice to the Supreme Being. For that system may be most worthy of his infinite wisdom and goodness, in which there are such dependencies of things as unavoidably produce those relative imperfections; and such a system may be better than another in which there should not be such dependencies, nor any of the evils arising from them. What is in the end best, that we may always be certain the Almighty will do. “ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do righteously?” To this every individual ought to submit; and for this no individual can have any just reason to arraign the divine adminis-

administration. In a family regulated in the best manner, with order and decency, there must be higher and lower stations: some must have, for example, hard labour assigned them; from which others, fitly placed in higher sphere, are exempted. Nor is the head of the family to be blamed for this arrangement; higher and lower stations are unavoidable: and if one who is in the lowest shall complain against him who placed him there, for the good of the whole, his complaint is certainly unjust.

This reasoning, so far as the analogy holds, may be applied to universal nature, and to the whole family of heaven and earth. If we complain that we are not so fortunate and happy as some of our fellow creatures, these may with as much reason complain that they are not so fortunate and happy as the angels. But both complaints are alike absurd. If one complains that distresses and calamities are appointed him, let him find out the man who has not the same cause of complaint. Even if we look into the orders of living creatures beneath

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us, and observe their subserviency to the use of man, many of our murmurs of this sort will appear very groundless: we see that some species of creatures are intended for the sustenance of others; and that all of them are, in some measure, subjected to the human race. By their labours we are served, by their skins and fleeces we are clothed, and by their flesh we are fed. The intention of the Creator is plainly, that these things should be so; and no man can reasonably complain of him for such intention, though in many cases much pain and suffering be the lot of those creatures, because the good of the whole must evidently overbalance the sufferings of the individual. And if we see this in other orders of sensitive beings, why should it not be so with respect to mankind? Indeed, if our existence, taken together, had more of misery than enjoyment in it, and this owing merely to the appointment of Providence, without any fault of ours, then the wretched individual might think such existence a
curse,

curse, and not a blessing. But we are expressly assured, that in acting our part well, we shall certainly be cared for, and made in the end very happy. We know, that every intelligent creature, obeying with sincerity the law he is under, shall find reason to exult in his life. The gospel, in particular, hath revealed this matter beyond all doubt; so that, with regard to the great ends of existence, we may have perfect satisfaction. And if so, ought we not to submit with chearfulness to those inconveniences, which are appointed with an express view of bringing to pass a greater good? How this is done, we cannot at present perceive; but still we ought, with the utmost resignation, to submit ourselves to the wisdom of Divine Providence. One thing we are sure of, that the Almighty will never inflict any pain, but what is either for the good of the individual suffering, or for the good of the whole, by supporting that order which is necessarily established. And it is for this very reason, that those pains, which are properly termed

punishment, are inflicted: for nothing of selfish revenge can be ascribed to God. Surely every good mind will heartily agree in the maintenance of that good order which is essential to the happiness of God's creation, by giving all diligence to act his part well, according to the laws which the Supreme Governor hath given us. Every creature, endowed with capacity of action, hath its part allotted in the general system; and every creature that is capable of reflection and beneficence, will intend the greatest good of this system. A different intention must infallibly be unnatural.—Multitudes of creatures we see, in this glorious system, incapable of voluntary obedience to laws; but, under the influence of the governing Power, effectually answering the Creator's design. The sun ceaseth not to dispense his light by day, nor the moon and the stars to govern the night, Year by year, the unwearied revolutions of nature return, bringing the spring, the summer, the harvest, and the winter, in faithful orbit. The rains fall, the winds blow,
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and the earth brings forth food for man and beast. The brutes, too, under the direction of instinct, still act uniformly in pursuance of the laws of their nature. Man, indeed, cannot be laid under such a necessity as the inanimate creatures, nor guided by invariable instinct, as the irrational; but he is made capable of a voluntary obedience, and acts with freedom, and from choice.

How unnatural, then, must it be not to obey, not to support, our character in the general system to the best of our power! It is as if the sun should cease to shine, the earth to be fruitful, the waters to flow, or the clouds to distil their dew. It is as if the horse and the ox, instead of submitting their peaceable necks to the yoke, should assault their keepers with their heels and horns. It is worse; for, to depart from the rules of action which God hath prescribed us, is not only unnatural, but criminal and impious, because it is a voluntary transgression. Human life hath been often fitly likened to a stage, where every man hath his part

assigned him. While he performs it well, whatever it may be, he serves the great Master of the drama—he serves universal nature as he ought. But if he fails in the performance, or if he acts a character directly contrary to that which is set down for him, then is he indeed a stain and disgrace to the creation.

It becomes us, therefore, as children of the good Father, as members of the great family, and as related to all things in it, to be pleased with whatever tends to the general good. We have the highest reason to be pleased: a most honourable station is assigned us; a glorious end of life is set before us; an end which, in pursuing the dictates of nature and conscience, we shall certainly attain. And in the duty which we owe to the great system, and to the Author of it, are comprehended all other duties arising from the more particular relations of human life: the tender husband, the faithful wife, the good parent, the dutiful child, the kind master, the diligent servant, the generous prince, the loyal subject, the affectionate

fectionate friend, the friendly neighbour—all these are acting the part which becomes them, and are the friends of nature. Nor can any man acquit himself well, without descending to the consideration of all those particular offices, which are necessary to complete his character. Such completion is the greatest end of true wisdom, without which life is but vanity and vexation of spirit. Perfection, indeed, is not attainable here; but, instead of it, sincerity will be accepted: and the pardon of sins, forsaken and lamented, is, by the promise of our Redeemer, ensured to us. In a little time, all that concerns the present state will be over; a few years more, and we shall go the way whence we shall not return: but our relation to universal nature continues for ever. Distinctions of high and low, prosperous and afflicted, on this earth, there have always been, and always must be; but, with respect to the chief ends of life, and the supreme good, no such distinctions are admitted. How much ought this to reconcile us to the universal con-

stitution! The poor, the unfortunate, the unhealthy, must feel, and may be disposed to complain; their personal merit, in their low estate, may be overlooked and forgotten: but, notwithstanding this unrighteous measure, how substantial is their inward consolation, from a sense that, in the lowest possible circumstances, we are capable of attaining the true ends of life! To this an ingenuous mind has recourse, as the best refuge in all misfortunes, knowing that it will form a distinction, and that a glorious one, when all others are lost for ever.—

When we are joined to the other sheep, which are not of this fold; when this present œconomy hath arrived at its period, and a more perfect one commences; then shall many that are first be last, and the last first; then shall be known and rewarded, the hidden life of those who have approved themselves friends of God, friends of virtue, and friends to the general system of the creation; then shall that system be comprehended and approved, and the Author and Finisher of it receive universal praise.

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What, then, are we? Amidst applauding worlds, shall there be found on earth one peevish voice, which jars in the grand chorus, and *complains*? No; let us laud and adore the eternal Parent of the numberless intellectual family, and rejoice in being members of it; let us rejoice, with confidence to run our race, looking to *him* who left us a perfect example; “who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame; and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XXVIII.

I COR. vii. 29.

THE TIME IS SHORT.

OUR time, though a possession incomparably the most precious, is that of which commonly we are the most profuse. As the opinion of wealth is the chief cause of want; so the great cause of our improvident expence of time is, that we fancy the store inexhaustible. There is a striking fallacy imposed on us, in the different view of past and future time: the same term of years which viewed backward appears contemptibly short, looking forward seems exceeding long. Either, as it is the nature of hope to flatter us, so
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all things seem larger at a distance, while they are only in expectation, than we can ever find them to be in fruition; or it is, that of our past lives we can make fresh and lively remarks, by recalling to memory the most notable passages that have fallen out within that period, by which means those equally remote portions of time are brought nearer to our view; but, on the contrary, on the time which is to come, we can make no remarks, because, not knowing what shall happen, we have nothing to fix our thoughts upon—it lies before us like a boundless ocean: for things which are in confusion seem to be more than the same things when digested into order.

But we are as liable to an error on the other hand, and may as unreasonably lament that we have too little time, as before we conceived that we had too much. That we are but the tenants of a few poor days, and that our lease, when expired, can never be renewed; that we cannot bring back again the hours which have so swiftly past,
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arrest the sun in his course, or stop the wheels of his chariot; has been often but a pompous excuse for melancholy and inactivity. Thus, to amuse ourselves with sadly complaining of the shortness of time, when we should address ourselves to its use, is only to make it shorter by the complaint. Even while I speak, the time is gone; and how much of it might go while we were thus vainly thinking how it went.

To rectify both these misapprehensions, we must consider that our time is exactly proportioned to our labour; that, although in other regards, "art is long, and life short," yet the true art of living is entirely consistent with the shortness of life.— We must consider, what is our real concern, and what account will be required at our hands. If this concern be in a good measure dispatched, our account is ready, we are masters of our time and of ourselves. The business of a Christian's life is to attain the end of his hope, that hope which is full of immortality. The account to be required of Christians is the use
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and improvement of their several talents; their endowments of mind, whether natural or acquired; their fortunes and estates, whether the inheritance of their fathers, or the fruit of their industry; their health of body; their station and profession; but, especially, the means of grace, the light and assistances afforded them in their passage through this world. These talents are to be employed, and consequently improved, by advancing ourselves in knowledge and virtue; by promoting the honour of God, and the happiness of man. He who is engaged sincerely in the pursuit of these designs, like the virgins in the parable, hath put oil into his lamp, such as not only measures the course of his time, but will light him beyond it, to the dawning of eternity.

Our religion is so far from engrossing all our time, and entrenching upon other employments and cares, that it even supposeth us to be more or less, according to our age, our health and ability, concerned in business and action; and prefers the
public

public offices of doing good among men, to the severer virtues of retirement, and the strictness of solitary piety. What diversion is, in respect of worldly business, such is the business of our profession, such are the affairs of the world, in respect of religion. The human mind is not able to bear a perpetual stretch, a constant labour and application in earthly things, much less in those of heaven. Under the former, we relieve ourselves by innocent sports and recreations, by moderate exercise, by studying the fine arts, and, above all, by the temperate enjoyment of virtuous and cheerful company. Under the latter, we are refreshed by a faithful diligence in our station, by an agreeable attendance upon the social duties; but as our pleasure is not to obtrude itself, in prejudice to our business, so neither is our business, like the tares in the gospel, to choke the word, or grow upon our duty. These three, if rightly applied, and managed in a just dependance, instead of hindering or interrupting, promote and assist each other. As diversion gives

gives us new vigour and spirit for labour, so the discharge of our honest labour gives more comfort and alacrity to our religious exercises. One thing is needful in order to a better world; but the rest are useful in the present, and even subservient to that one thing needful. Thus, there is a decent mixture, a sweet interchange, a fit subordination, of all the lawful uses of time, that we may be always regular and easy, satisfied as men and as Christians, as they who know how to live, and they who have not their hope in this life only.

This is the true philosophy of time, according to the observation of the apostle, that, because the time is short, we ought so to use the world as not abusing it. A spirit of sacred fervour must animate all our actions; we must be busied while the light remains, for soon the night comes on when no man can work; we must watch, because the Son of man, whom we wait for, is already at hand; we must profit by the talents which we have in trust, for the Lord, who bestowed them, will quickly
come

come and demand an account; our lamps must be kept continually burning, for the bridegroom comes in an hour when he is not expected; we must haste to bring forth good fruits, for behold the harvest is already begun. What is this work which we are commanded to forward, but our progress in the way of salvation; what is this watch which we are to keep, but perpetual attention over ourselves; what are those lamps that must for ever burn, but the edification of an exemplary life; what those fruits we must bring forth, but the works of penitence and sanctification; and this time of harvest, this return of the master, this arrival of the bridegroom, this night of darkness, are no more than very natural figures, used by the Son of God, to express the uncertainty of life, the proximity of death, and the madness of languor and inactivity.

Indeed, though we could expect to live for a long train of ages; though the Almighty, whether from motives of severity or kindness we cannot tell, had allowed us

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to exist on this earth as the ancient patriarchs did; still we should have a thousand reasons for husbanding our time with the utmost care. However distant the concluding period of our life might be, still it would be certain: all our actions would have eternal consequences, be the subject of the judgment of God, the price of immortal felicity or the cause of endless woe. Still, therefore, it would be necessary to perform them in a manner worthy of that God whom we serve, and that recompense which we expect; and most wretched should we be, even in that case, if our time were neglected or abused. But how different is our situation from this; and yet how incapable of influencing our conduct! We are perhaps upon the eve of appearing before God, and yet we slumber on quietly and negligently. Insensible of every warning that is given, our indolence still continues; because indeed we never consider well the shortness of our time: for, if we were well convinced of this; if we would suppose that we had but a few days remain-

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ing; if we would say with St. Paul, "the time of my final dissolution draweth near," I am as a victim appointed to be slain, and already sprinkled for the sacrifice; if an angel from heaven should assure us of this—the idea, though a mere supposition, has something striking: what would we do? nay, what would we not do?

If we would know how a man speaks and acts, who believes his time near a close, and makes eternity the subject of his reflections, the good king Hezekiah offers us a remarkable example. "I said," says the pious monarch, "I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years; I shall behold the inhabitants of the world no more: I must leave this terrestrial abode, and be carried elsewhere, as a shepherd removes his tent from one field to another." It was for this that he applied himself to meditate on the judgments of God; that he lamented and mourned like the solitary bird; that his eyes were wasted with looking upward; and that he begged of the Almighty

mighty to prolong his life. "The grave," continues he, "cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee;" but the living shall glorify thee as I do this day, who am persuaded that I must soon die, and who make that persuasion the rule of my actions. Thus speaks the religious king; and hence we are taught that rule, so simple and so practicable, though so little practised—of performing all our religious actions, as if every one were the last: to pray with the same fervor as we shall pray at the approach of death; to examine our consciences with the same severe scrutiny we shall then practise; to bewail our sins with the same bitterness, and form resolutions with the same firmness and ardour.

These are the salutary effects which the firm belief of our uncertain duration would produce;—and why are they not produced? The Saviour of the world has declared this uncertainty; and shall the word of God have less efficacy than that of an angel? No, this cannot be! and the counsel of God for the salvation of man, in this

matter, is wonderful: for, however faintly our morals are influenced by the darkness that hangs over the verge of life, it is highly probable this influence would still abate if the obscurity were removed. If the day and hour of our departure were clearly revealed, secure of time for enjoyment, we would pursue the world with redoubled eagerness; every work of piety would be referred to the last year; and, in the last year, to the last month, to the last week, and perhaps to the last day: but the day of death, we know, is no time for completing that arduous task, which ought to occupy all our lives; it is not time for efforts of penitence, nor emanations of charity; and yet penitence and good works are the only means of salvation. How great then is the wisdom and mercy of the Supreme Being! since, by concealing from us the last moment of our time, he inclines us to employ every moment to advantage. Would to Heaven we might always consider it in this light, and ever carry this idea in our view! Nothing could so contribute

bute to our advancement in piety; nothing so support us against every difficulty. Far from weariness or failing, our vigour would encrease with our days and years. We would soon fulfil that beautiful character of the Christian life drawn by the apostle, being kindly affectioned, active, fervent in spirit, instant in prayer, hospitable, sympathetic, and universally charitable. By recalling and disengaging our thoughts from the things of this world, we might in some sense leave it; and by fixing them on heavenly things, we might stand on the confines of the other. Here we could regard the commotions of the earth, and the revolutions of time, with no more concern than becomes an immortal being. From this earth we know we shall soon be removed; and the earth itself shall at last be removed, surrounded with flames, and dissolved by elemental heat: our time we know is very short; and the sun, that now measures its duration, shall one day fall from his course in heaven. Yet those great changes affect not

our immortal state: we depend on a Being who is eternal and unchangeable, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, and one day as a thousand years.

S E R-

S E R M O N XXIX.

J U D G E S, xxi. 25.

THEY SAID, CALL FOR SAMSON, THAT HE MAY MAKE US SPORT. AND THEY CALLED FOR SAMSON OUT OF THE PRISON-HOUSE; AND HE MADE THEM SPORT.

IT has been remarked, that characters which, at first view, strike one with esteem or admiration, generally fall off upon more intimate acquaintance. When high expectations are formed, disappointment is more heavily felt; and when we conceive a great opinion of any person, the slightest impropriety in his behaviour gives us a shock. The history of Samson, one of the most singular personages that ever

the world saw, strongly confirms the truth of this observation.—It seems as a picture, held forth by the Spirit of Wisdom, to show us on what a sandy foundation all schemes that depend on human force are built,—how weak and foolish a creature man at best is,—how fatal the effects of dissipation are to him,—and of how little avail the greatest natural powers are, unless duly governed and applied to proper ends.

The extraordinary and preternatural circumstances that usher Samson into the world, raise our hopes of his future exploits and military glory to the highest pitch. Announced by the repeated descent of an angel,—born of a mother till then deemed barren,—nursed up by a particular regimen revealed from heaven,—and declared the deliverer of his country, we think there is nothing too much to be expected from such a hero.

We are disappointed at his very first appearance in public—the very opening of his career is unfavourable. He connects himself in the tenderest manner with the enemies

mies of his country, in defiance of the advices and remonstrances of his parents. His killing the lion was a wanton exertion of his amazing strength; natural enough for a young man, but adding nothing to the bright side of his character. The champion of Israel ought to have had nobler employments than waging war with the beasts of the field. The use, however, which he afterwards made of that feat, involved him in some petty broils with the relations of his wife; and, in the end, induced him to kill thirty men, to pay a forfeit lost by his own imprudence. Upon this occasion, the sacred historian uses an expression, that "the spirit of the Lord came upon Samson."—By which I understand, not that God directed him to put to death those men, because it was an unjust and cruel action—but only that he was enabled to do it by the supernatural strength which he had received from heaven.

His next exploit was to burn the fields of the Philistines by a very singular stratagem, in revenge for the treachery of his father—

father-in-law. But all this while, so little were his countrymen sensible of the eminence of his character, that when the Philistines rose to resent the destruction of their corn and vineyards, the very tribe with whom he sojourned agreed to deliver him up.—He seemed even to think it a favour that they themselves did not slay him; and ere he would trust himself in their hands, exacted an oath, that no violence should by them be offered to him. The Philistines then receiving him bound, and apparently defenceless, began to exult over the supposed fall of their terrible adversary: upon which he rose in all his strength, and in fair battle slew a thousand of them. This is unquestionably the greatest action of his life.

Soon after, he was again ensnared by the sin which seems most easily to have beset him—a love for strange women. Confident of his resistless strength, he suffered himself to be surrounded and shut up in the house of his mistress, in the heart of a city where his name was detested. He accordingly

ingly effected his escape with ease; but in a manner that marked his common wanton misapplication of that amazing force which Nature had given him for better purposes. To have burst open the gates, was sufficient for his enlargement; but not content with that, he tears them quite away, and carries them up to the top of a hill: a movement which added nothing either to his freedom or security.

Untaught by this hair-breadth escape, we find him yet once more entangled by the same intoxicating passion. That connection proved fatal; and the relation of his conduct in it, shows him to us in a light so poor and despicable, that we can hardly afford a tear to its tragical catastrophe.—

At the opening of this scene of treachery on the one hand, and weakness on the other, Samson appears to act with some degree of caution, by giving false information to the abandoned creature who sought his ruin. But this only serves to make his succeeding dotage more conspicuous: for by discovering to him her infamous design,
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it ought to have set him on his guard against allowing her any share of his confidence. It ought, indeed, that moment to have detached him from her altogether. But it did neither: for after amusing her several times with a repetition of the same trick, he at length, with infantine folly, revealed his dearest secret to her; and she, without delay, availed herself of it to work his destruction.

The indignation we feel here, however, soon subsides, and yields to pity. We find him now reduced to a state of wretchedness, in which the view of his misery makes us forget his imprudence. How fallen! alas, how changed! this once resistless hero.—From mowing down ranks of warriors with his single arm,—from piercing ferried squadrons unarmed and alone,—from standing like a rock in the midst of waves, smiling at the feeble attacks of surrounding foes,—reduced to work the drudgery of a condemned slave, in prison and cruel darkness; and, when removed from this, to suffer yet worse disgrace, to make sport for the rabble,—

ble,—to be exposed in the theatre like a sort of monster,—the object of derision and scorn;—we cannot wonder that, weary of his life, he seized that opportunity of putting an end to it, especially as he could sweeten the horrors of death by the pleasure of revenge. There is no reason to suppose that patriotism had any share in this action, nor any other motive but disgust at existence, and a desire of private vengeance.

In reading the life of this extraordinary man, we feel almost a continual disappointment. Warmed by the ideas of a judge, a deliverer, an invincible hero,—imagination bodies forth a train of glorious scenes. We fancy him in the dawn of youth, inuring himself to hardship and toil; associating with those most capable of aiding him in enterprises of difficulty; taking the field at length, attended by the young in person, and by the aged in their blessings and prayers: Mighty battles then are fought, and won chiefly by his prowess; till, by a series of honourable victories, the peace of his country being secured, and its glory
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sufficiently advanced, he returns to govern by his wisdom the people he had defended by his valour.

Instead of all this, he only engages in a few private broils, hurtful to himself, and useless to his country; enervates himself by varied dissipation; seems almost sinking into effeminacy; and falls, ingloriously, by the deceitful blandishments of a worthless woman.

What instruction can this character afford us? There is evidently no distinguishing feature in it, except that of bodily strength;—all the rest is common, and, alas! too common. In the growth, texture, and mechanism of his bones and muscles, Samson stands aloof from all the sons of Adam: in every thing else, he falls into the ordinary rank of mortals. No person now receives such a talent in trust; and therefore it is needless to frame speculations concerning the use or abuse of it. We must look for some of Nature's gifts more generally bestowed; which, by comparison

parison with this, we may learn to estimate truly, and cultivate advantageously.

The choice is not perplexing. We see daily, in the haunts of men, a character in all its dangers and temptations, nearly akin to corporeal strength,—which is corporeal beauty. “The human form, divine,” always respectable when inhabited by Virtue, is found at times so exquisitely finished, that Imagination, in her most creative mood, can shape nothing beyond it.

This curious workmanship of Nature, in every age profusely exerted, and with inexhaustible variety, gives to certain individuals of both sexes a distinction impossible to be described, though easily and irresistibly felt. We are forced to add, that it is a distinction in general disadvantageous to its possessor. The folly of parents, the early adulation of interested admirers, the suggestions of self-conceit and a thousand other enemies, conspire against those favourites of Nature; and, at one time or other, render them objects of weariness,
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if not of disgust. Trusting entirely to external charms, every solid and permanent accomplishment is by them neglected, while they spend the inestimable days of youth in acquiring a few superficial and transitory trifles, as frail as the beauty they are meant to adorn. How many delightful forms attract our attention, which, upon examination, we quit with a sigh of pity or a smile of contempt; finding their minds either mere voids of nothingness,—blanks of infidelity,—or despicable magazines of vanity and folly. How many a young female thus steps into the world, confident of her charms as Samson of his strength, untutored by Wisdom, unguarded by Prudence,—running wild through all the mazes of fantastic dissipation, and in the end, perhaps, drawing ruin upon herself? How many a young man, thus depending on the graces of his bodily frame, spends his best years, utterly neglectful of every noble purpose and rational enjoyment of life, despised by every man (and woman too) of sense, and only acceptable

ceptable to beings whose frivolity equals his own?

But neither of these characters will feel all their misery during the days of youth and luxuriant health; for then their society will be tolerated by most people, and even courted by many: yet by how precarious a tenure do they hold even that privilege! Their enjoyment resembles his, who feasted royally in a room of state with a sword over his head, suspended by a single hair. And though they should escape the strokes of sickness and of accident, yet soon will the scene of joy be closed;—soon will the ruthless hand of Time crop every flower of youth and beauty:—Then what a disconsolate and dreary waste succeeds!—I am not able to imagine a state on earth more wretched, than that of a person advanced in life, whose mind has never known the happy effects of cultivation, and whose pleasures have been merely constitutional.—Better were it indeed for that man never to have been born, than to drag the languid hours of age in listless weariness,—neglec-

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ted,—despised,—and forgotten even before his death.—It is a state of desolation against which the young ought carefully to fortify themselves by a diligent culture of their best powers, and by acquiring those accomplishments and amusements which depend not for their relish on the fine turn of the limbs, the brilliancy of the eyes, or the polish and transparent glow of the skin.

In general, it is wrong to trust blindly for our happiness to any one natural gift, and neglect every other useful attainment. This remark greatly widens the field of instruction. We are not all men of strength—we are not all beauties; but we have all received some talent in trust from Heaven, for which we are accountable. To mistake that talent,—to over-rate it, or to misapply it,—are the chief misfortunes to which we are exposed: and he only fulfils the purposes of his life, who, by judicious inquiry, and by proper knowledge of himself, discovers where his strength lies; who strives to form a right estimation of it, and to enforce its exertions by every advantage in his
5 JY61
power

power to obtain; who will not reveal it to the unworthy, exhaust it in vile pursuits, nor prostitute it to the advancement of ends which religion forbids, and wisdom reprobates.

By such rational and manly conduct, we may render our characters respectable; and it will be beyond the power of our most malicious enemies to make sport of them: We may secure our happiness, at least as far as human happiness can be secured; and while free from outward misfortune, we may enjoy every hour with relish. Age, which brings the frivolous, the idle, and the dissipated, to a state of premature oblivion, will only make us more venerable, and turn our enjoyments into a current more serene and pure. Man will admire a life so beautiful, and God will reward it.

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to the world, who will not reveal it to
 the unworthy, except it is in the pursuit
 of the good, it is the advancement of ends
 which religion forbids, and which religion
 forbids. By such rational and moral conduct, we
 may render our characters respectable, and
 it will be the power of our moral nature
 to make us happy. We may secure our happiness, at least as far as
 human happiness can be secured, and while
 we are from outward misfortune, we may en-
 joy every hour of our lives, which
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 apart, to a state of permanent division.
 will only make a more vast and more
 our existence, and a more more intense
 and pure. Man will admit a life to be
 that, and God will reward it.

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